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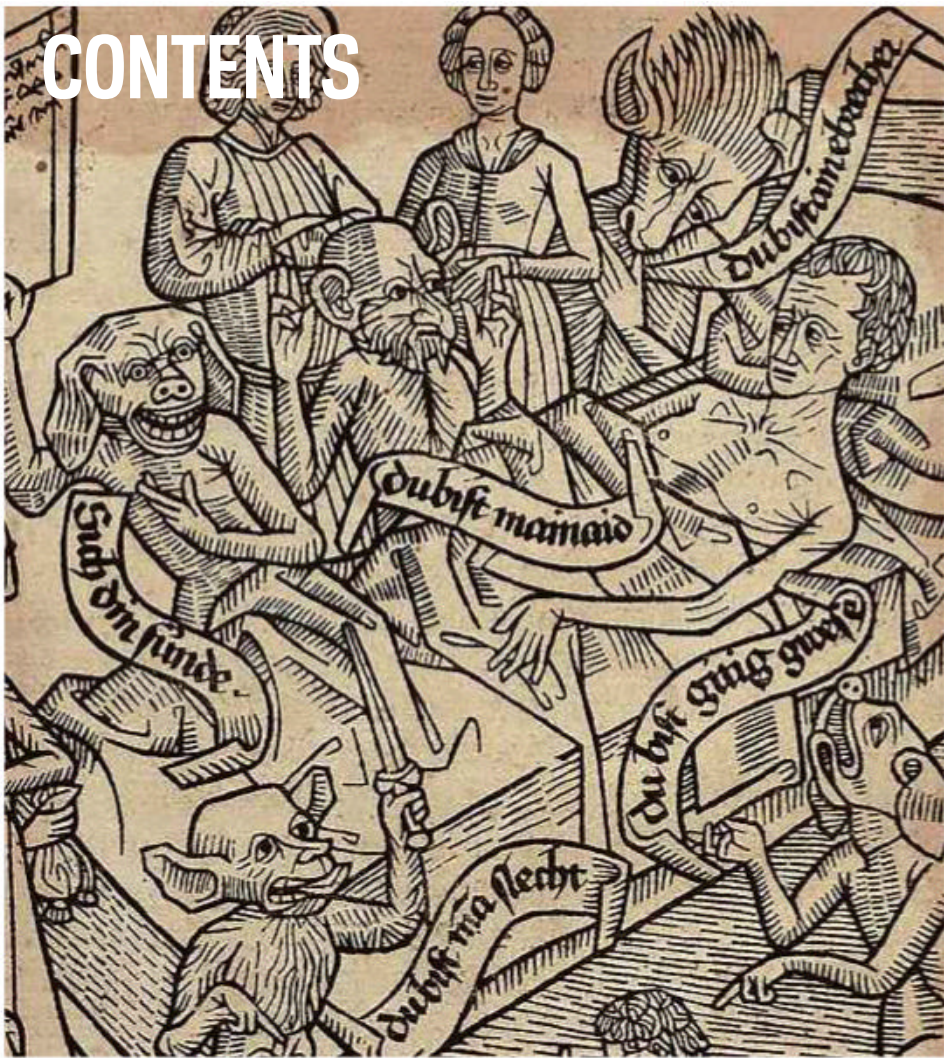
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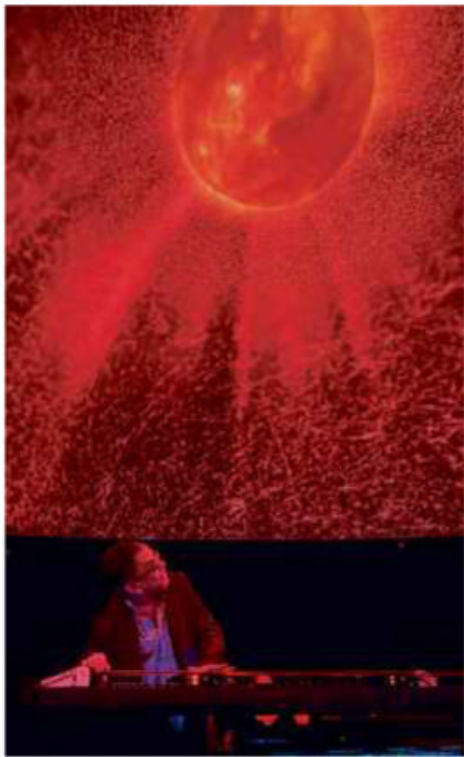




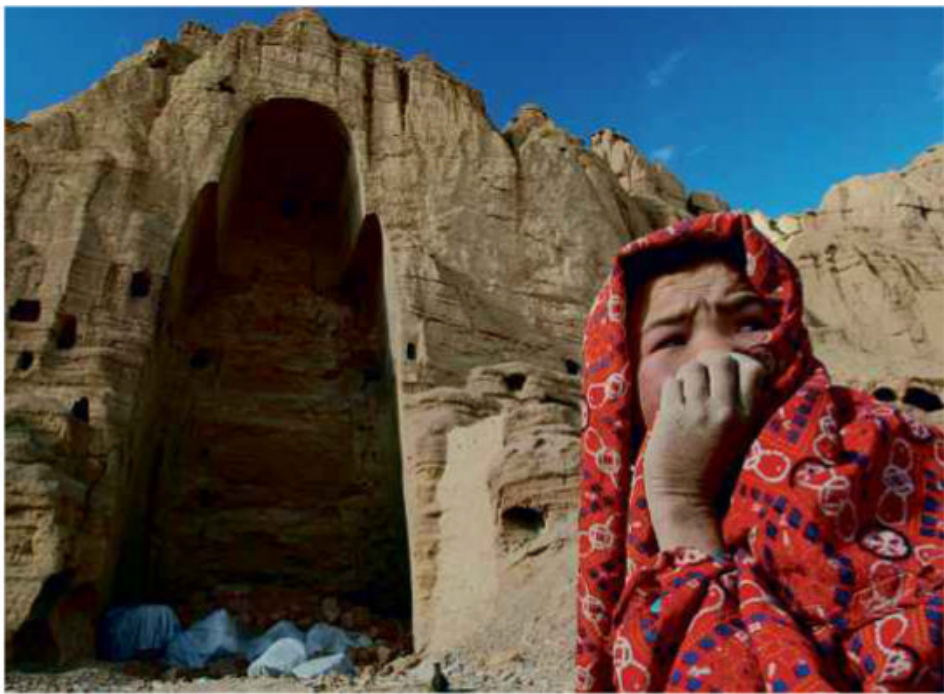
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**EDITOR**  
DAVID SUTTON  
drsutton@forteantimes.com

**FOUNDING EDITORS**  
BOB RICKARD (ft-bobrickard@mail.com)  
PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteantimes.com)

**NEWS EDITOR**  
CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE (csjosiffe@forteantimes.com)

**ART DIRECTOR**  
ETIENNE GILFILLAN (etienne@forteantimes.com)

**BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR**  
DAVID V BARRETT (dvbarrett@forteantimes.com)

**EDITORIAL ASSISTANT**  
ABIGAIL MASON

**RESIDENT CARTOONIST**  
HUNT EMERSON

**SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES AND BACK ISSUES**  
www.managemymags.co.uk  
customercare@subscribe.forteantimes.com

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FORTEAN TIMES IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERNATIONAL LICENSING AND SYNDICATION – CONTACT:  
Senior Group Licensing Manager  
CARLOTTA SERANTONI TEL: +44 (0) 20 3890 3840  
carlotta\_serantoni@dennis.co.uk  
Licensing Content Manager  
NICOLE CREASEY TEL: +44 (0) 20 3890 3998  
nicole\_creasey@dennis.co.uk

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**MD SPECIALIST DIVISION**  
DHARMESH MISTRY  
dharmesh\_mistry@  
dennis.co.uk

**CIRCULATION MANAGER**  
JAMES MANGAN  
james.mangan@  
seymour.co.uk

**EXPORT CIRCULATION MANAGER**  
GERALDINE GROBLER  
geraldine.grobler@  
seymour.co.uk

**SENIOR PRODUCTION MANAGER**  
EBONY BASAGNI

ebony\_basagni@  
dennis.co.uk

**GROUP ADVERTISING DIRECTOR LIFESTYLE**  
ANDREA MASON  
020 3890 3814  
andrea\_mason@  
dennis.co.uk

**ADVERTISING DIRECTOR**  
HELEN RUANE  
020 3890 3899  
helen\_ruane@  
dennis.co.uk

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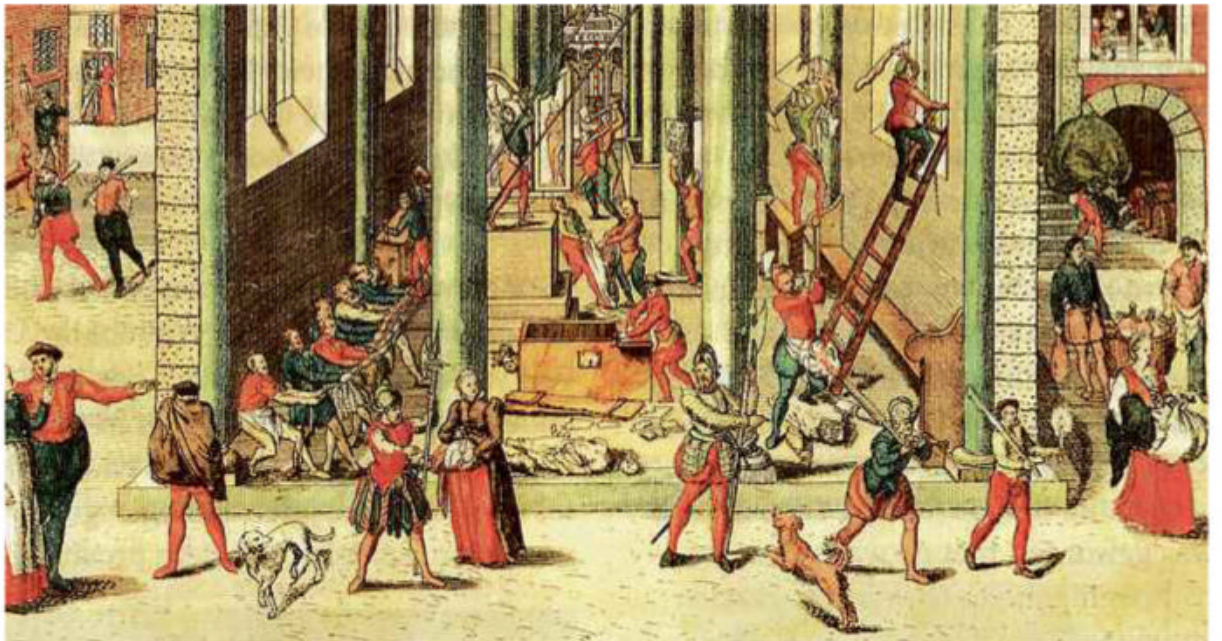
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# EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

## SMASHING TIME



As we slip into autumn with the world still in the grip of the pandemic (turn to p.8 for our round-up of Covid-19 news), we can look back at a summer marked by protests and demonstrations (often mobilising the current concerns of the conspirasphere, from 5G to global elite paedophile rings; see p.4) and even a wave of iconoclasm of a kind not witnessed in the West for centuries (the illustration shows the Belgian *Beeldenstorm* of 1566). In this month's cover story (p.32) Alan Murdie asks whether the frenzy of statue-toppling we've witnessed in recent months might be more than just a form of explosive historical revisionism fuelled by energies pent up by months of lockdown: do statues and monuments embody deeper human fears about death and the uncanny? From ambulatory stone lions and wandering giants to swaying Virgins, there is a rich lore devoted to moving statues.

Off world, things have been equally interesting. September brought news that British scientists had discovered evidence of phosphine in the atmosphere of Venus; this smelly, toxic gas shouldn't be there – on Earth, it occurs as the result of industrial or microbial processes – and has been interpreted as a possible 'biosignature' indicative of life. Sceptics have expressed doubts, but as David Hambling suggests in this month's Science column (p.16), while the Perseverance rover has blasted off for Mars, it might be looking for signs of historic life in the wrong places on the Red Planet: in fact, we may need a broader definition – dubbed 'lyfe' – in order to find life hiding in plain sight. Meanwhile, Jenny Randles (p.30) argues that our use of technology like the Martian rovers ought to prompt a rethink of the nature of UFOs.

### GETTING COPIES OF FT

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### ERRATA

**FT394:35:** In our cover feature on the Mandela Effect, Nick Bostrom was named as a "Swiss philosopher", while he was in fact born in Sweden. "The article writer would certainly not be the first to mix up Sweden with Switzerland, but I thought I should point it out nonetheless," wrote Petter Fredriksson of Sweden (not Switzerland).

**FT395:28:** Some copy got lost from Ulrich Magin's report on the only village in Pavia Province, Lombardy, that was completely free of Covid infections. The Mayor had suggested this was perhaps due to "some unusual genetic trait of the locals."

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

# STRANGE DAYS

## LOCKDOWN'S DISCONTENTS

Summer protests reveal a loose coalition of conspiracists and dissenters

By the time you read this, the UK and several other European countries will likely be hit by Covid-19's second wave. At the time of writing, the UK's rapidly rising infection rate looked set to match April and May's peak figures of 6,000+ per day. It seems doubtful that the UK Government will seek to reimpose the same national lockdown as in Spring, for fear of causing further harm to the economy. Instead, the current strategy appears to be focused on local curfews and lesser restrictions. Five months on, though, some are querying the wisdom of lockdown strategies. Sweden was the only European nation not to go into lockdown. Some UK health experts predicted a Swedish death rate of 85,000; in fact, the figure has been under 6,000, certainly much higher than Sweden's Nordic neighbours, but nothing like as catastrophic as was feared. This inaccurate forecasting by some of the same health experts guiding UK Government strategy has doubtless encouraged 'Covid-scepticism', as perhaps have the Government's various U-turns.

Numerous anti-lockdown protests have been taking place up and down the country; the largest so far, in London on Saturday 29 August, was organised by Piers Corbyn (Jeremy Corbyn's climate change sceptic brother). A reported 10,000 people gathered in Trafalgar Square to hear Corbyn, David Icke and other speakers denounce the lockdown as an infringement of civil liberties with a hidden agenda of compulsory vaccination,



ABOVE: Crowds in Trafalgar Square for the 'Unite for Freedom' protest on 29 August.

orchestrated, some claimed, by Bill Gates or George Soros. Although several placards with QAnon slogans were spotted, it doesn't seem to be the case that this or other demos were organised by a single group or organisation. Rather, they appear to be a loose coalition of anti-vaxxers, anti-5Gers and Covid-sceptics.

Hundreds gathered again at Trafalgar Square three weeks later for 19 September's 'Resist And Act For Freedom Rally'. Outnumbered police were forced back by protesters carrying placards reading "THIS IS NOW TYRANNY" and "PLANDEMIC", and after scuffles and missiles being thrown, 32 people were arrested.

One possible reason for the protesters' ire was Piers Corbyn having been arrested and fined £10,000 for organising the 30 August demo, in contravention of a new law forbidding outdoor

gatherings of over 30 persons, and potentially spreading the virus (this has now been reduced to a maximum of six people). However, the environmental group Extinction Rebellion were also gathering in numbers of over 30 in London that same week, and none of their organisers have yet been fined £10,000.

Perhaps the most extraordinary action recently was that outside Buckingham Palace on 22 August, when protesters chanted "pædophile" while holding signs reading: "END CHILD TRAFFICKING", "THE FACT THAT COVID-19 HAS MORE OF YOUR ATTENTION THAN A GLOBAL ELITE PAEDOPHILE RING BLOWS MY MIND", and "PRINCE ANDREW WE JUST WANNA TALK".

The demo was apparently organised by Freedom For The Children UK (FFTCUK), the British branch of a new US

group which held numerous gatherings across the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand on the same day, as well as in 11 British cities. Their branding is (deliberately?) vague, and attracts those concerned by genuine child trafficking. However, several of the group's central UK organisers have expressed QAnon beliefs. FFTCUK has also been linked to Stand Up X, associated with anti-lockdown protests – further indication of disparate groups with apparently different aims coming together. These UK events are also significant in that what may previously have been thought of as US-specific conspiracy concerns (Pizzagate, QAnon) are now making their way across the pond (see p.20).

Whatever one's views about the reality of global elite pædophile rings (who may or may not be harvesting innocents' adrenal glands for their own depraved ends), there are still unanswered questions regarding Prince Andrew's friendship with Jeffrey Epstein, and his failure to cooperate with the FBI regarding Virginia Giuffre's allegations. And as a substantial minority become increasingly sceptical about the UK Government's handling of the pandemic, and increasingly resentful of restrictions to their daily lives, we may expect further dissent.

As we go to press, it has been announced that all UK pubs must shut at 10pm, as if the coronavirus, vampire-like, only emerges at night. A dangerous tactic: any politician interfering with Brits' time-honoured right to drink themselves into oblivion until closing time does so at their peril. *Sun*, 25 Aug; *hopenothate.org.uk*, 28 Aug; *thejc.com*, 30 Aug; *Spectator*, 4 Sept; *D.Mail*, 19 Sept 2020.





## OPEN THE BOX!

New York farmer finds mystery safe in his field

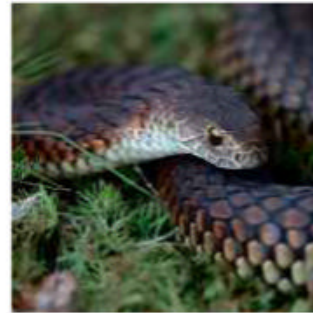
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## SKINWALKER SCIENCE

Investigating Utah's most notorious ranch

PAGE 21



## SNAKES ALIVE!

Serpentine surprises in New Zealand

PAGE 27

# TRANSGENDER VIKINGS

Was the occupant of the Birka grave a female warrior or a transgender man?

Notwithstanding their reputation for bravery on the battlefield and macho behaviour off it, some Vikings, historians are now arguing, may have been transgender men. Three years ago, a burial site assumed to belong to a high-status male warrior from the mid-900s was found to contain a female skeleton instead (FT361:18). Neil Price, professor of archaeology at the University of Uppsala, Sweden, writes in his new book that the female-bodied Viking may “have been transgender... or non-binary, or gender fluid.” The grave, in which swords, spears and two slaughtered horses were found alongside an expensively dressed skeleton, was first excavated in Birka, Sweden, in 1878. An osteological study in 2011 suggested the skeleton was female, but it was confirmed to carry XX chromosomes only six years later after DNA analysis. The extravagance of the grave suggests that the woman was of high status, or indicates that Norse women fought in battle alongside men. A third possibility, that it belonged to a warrior with a different gender identity, is given prominence by Prof Price in his book, *The Children of Ash and Elm: A History of the Vikings*.

“We think the most likely explanation is that this was a female warrior, but there are other ways of reading this,” he says. “It may have been someone who, in our terms, was a trans man, someone living as a man.” Prof Price argues that there are some other indications that Vikings thought in less binary terms about gender than was once believed. These include laws preventing men and women from breaking gender norms in terms of dress and behaviour, which, he said showed that a few people did subvert these traditions. In some mediæval texts retelling Viking sagas, women



TANCREDI VALERI



who became warriors would be given male pronouns.

Price dismissed the idea that this is simply historians projecting contemporary values onto the past, and Amy Jefford Franks, an academic researching gender and pre-Christian

Scandinavian religion and who presents the *Vikings are Gay!* podcast, said: “It is debated, but my view is that there were transgender Vikings and there were queer Vikings and that, while it was not widespread, it was on the fringes of acceptable culture.”

However, Viking society did not embrace all forms of diversity. A false accusation that a man was gay was equivalent to murder, says Price, “because you were effectively murdering someone’s honour.” *Times*, 17 Aug 2020.

## EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

**DEAD HEDGEHOGS  
PRESSED INTO  
SERVICE TO TEST  
OUT ROBOTIC  
MOWERS**

D.Telegraph, 22 July 2020.

**Stuffed giraffe  
rider jailed for  
illegal trading**

<i> 9 Dec 2015.

**FAT-BOTTOMED  
SQUIRRELS  
FINDING MORE  
TIME TO DINE**

Toronto Star, 9 Dec 2015.

**Elephant killed  
by exploding  
fruit turned into  
sectarian issue**

Guardian, 6 June 2020.

**DECEASED CAT  
GETS VOTER  
REGISTRATION  
APPLICATION  
IN MAIL**

Associated Press,  
12 July 2020.



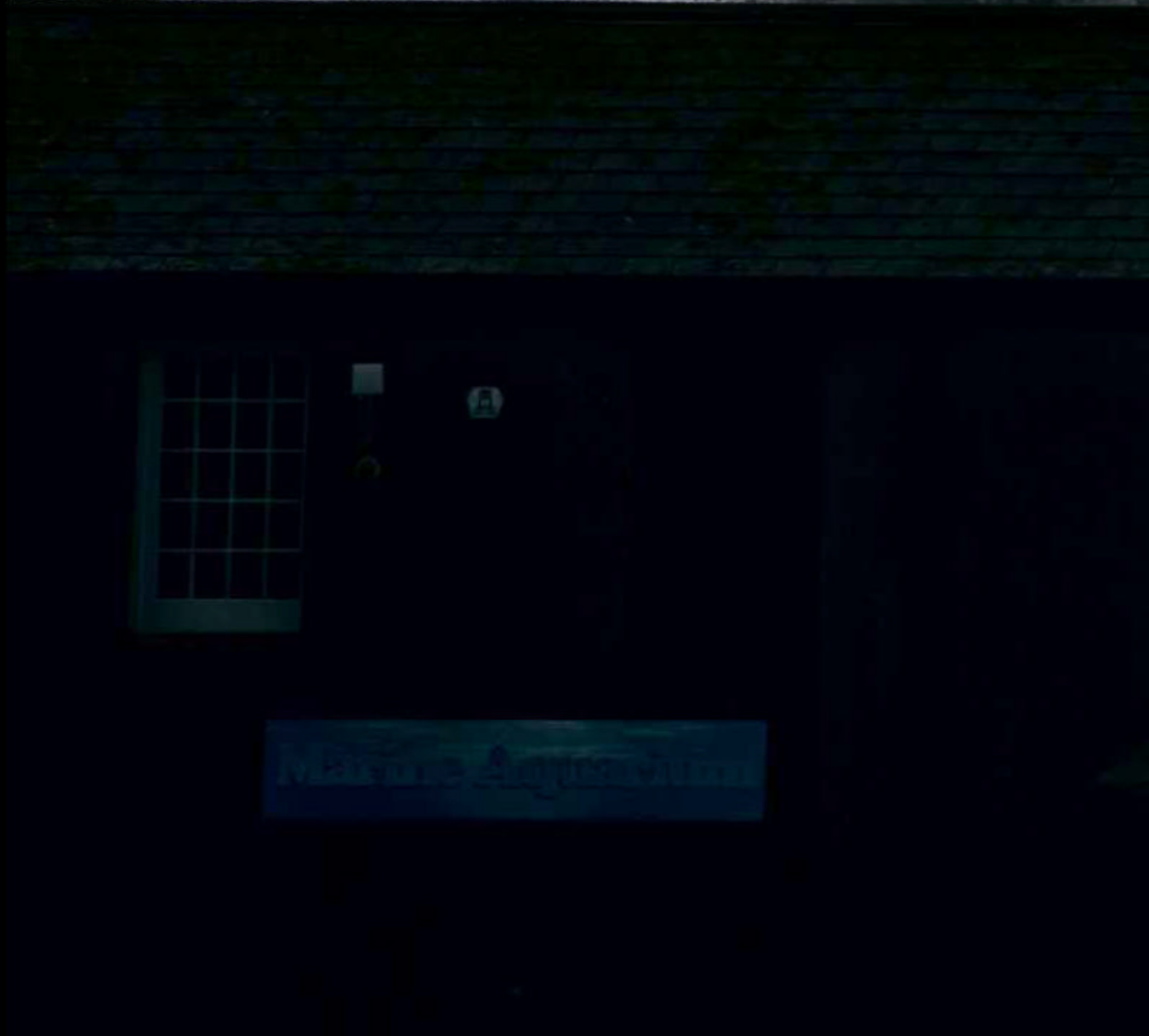
# WITCH OF THE WAVES

This stunning image shows the face of a what looks like a witch formed in a giant wave.

Back in February, photographer Simon Emmett (below) was out taking pictures ahead of the arrival of Storm Dennis on the Dorset Coast when he inadvertently captured the sinister-looking sorceress erupting out of the ocean. He didn't see the huge face at the time he took the shot; it was only later, when he was reviewing his images that he was stunned to come across the witch, complete with crooked nose and pointy chin.

Simon took the photograph at the storm-lashed Cobb harbour in his hometown of Lyme Regis, Dorset. He said: "I just went down to the Cobb to get some stormy scenes. It was just about timing the waves as they came up. I caught two faces in the waves – but the second one looked just like a witch."

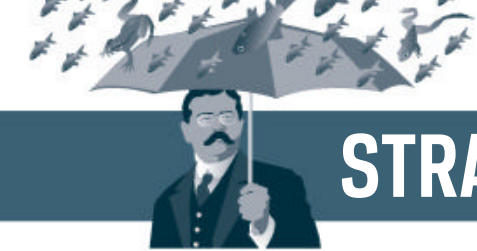
**PHOTOGRAPHS: SIMON EMMETT**











## SIDELINES...

### UNFORTUNATE NAME

School caretaker Stewart Milne, 44, was cycling back home to wrap Christmas presents in December 2017 when he was killed after being struck by a car in Cambridge. The driver, Miles Polite, had been speeding ahead of another car that had annoyed him. *BBC News*, 24+25 Aug 2020.

### SURFING SAFARI

A British man rescued from the ocean by Spanish coastguards claimed to have spent three days adrift at sea on a surfboard after falling off a cruise ship. The 55-year-old was picked up 10 miles (16km) south-west of Marbella after being spotted at sea by a yachtsman. *dailymail.co.uk*, 25 Aug 2020.

### VOMIT FRAUD

Unscrupulous Uber drivers are scamming passengers by billing them for non-existent clean-up costs. Uber policy charges \$80 (£60) if a passenger vomits or spills a drink on the seats, rising to \$150 (£110) in cases of "significant quantities of body fluids (urine, blood or vomit) in the interior of the vehicle". *chicagotribune.com*, 24 July 2018.

### SINGING DOGS

An extremely rare breed of wild dog, thought to have become extinct except for captive individuals held in zoos and conservation centres, has been spotted in the wild. The New Guinea singing dog is known for its unique barks and howls, and can also make harmonic sounds like the calls of a humpback whale. *[CNN]* 1 Sep 2020.



## COVID CORNER | Tribal peoples under threat, bored ravens and some good news for Britain's hens



OLIVIER BLAISE / GETTY IMAGES

**LEFT:** The Jarawa are one of the tribal peoples of the Andaman Islands whose survival is now further threatened by the spread of Covid-19.

### ANDAMAN EXTINCTION

Fears for the survival of indigenous communities living in the remote Andaman and Nicobar Islands have been heightened by the news that 10 of the 50 remaining Great Andamanese tribe have been infected with coronavirus. Six are recovering at home under quarantine, but four remain in hospital.

The tribe lives on tiny Strait Island, one of 572 islands between the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea, of which 38 are inhabited. While the government provides food and shelter, some Andamanese people work in the capital, Port Blair, where it is thought they were infected. To date, the island chain has reported 2,268 infections and 37 deaths. The archipelago is home to five indigenous peoples, the Great Andamanese, the Jarawa, North Sentinelese, Onge and Shompen, of whom only 400-450 remain. DNA evidence suggests they migrated from Africa around 60,000 BC, becoming isolated from other populations circa 30,000 BC during the Middle Palaeolithic era. Further isolation from each other led to the development of distinct languages and other cultural traits. All five have seen dramatically decreased

*In order to protect the islanders, access is forbidden*

populations over the past 250 years due to conflict with European settlers and illnesses caused by contact with the outside world for which their immune systems have no resistance.

The first European contact came in 1755 when the Danish East India Company landed, attempting to establish colonies which repeatedly failed due to malaria outbreaks. In 1789, the British set up a naval base and penal colony on Chatham Island. When they arrived in the early 19th century there were 5,000 Great Andamanese; but hundreds died fighting the invaders and thousands more were later wiped out by measles, influenza and syphilis epidemics. Tuberculosis and alcoholism are also rife, both of which are believed to render the tribe more vulnerable to Covid-19. Britain established a more permanent settlement at Port Blair in 1857, a substantial penal colony incarcerating

prisoners from the Indian Mutiny. Those convicts who were not hanged suffered life imprisonment with hard labour, many dying from disease and ill-treatment. Towards the end of the 19th century, the British constructed the notorious Cellular Jail here – a huge prison housing Indian political prisoners from the burgeoning independence movement.

In order to protect the remaining islanders, access to the archipelago is forbidden, although poachers and fishermen occasionally trespass. The Jarawa and Sentinelese in particular have resisted outside contact and maintain their independence, despite the island group being a Union Territory of India since 1956. In 2018, Christian missionary John Allen Chau, 26, a US national, was shot dead with arrows by the Sentinelese after illegally chartering a boat to North Sentinel Island where he hoped to convert the tribe (see **FT376:23**). His body was never recovered.

Survival International, a London group campaigning for the rights of tribal communities, urged local authorities to protect the tribes after five welfare staff working with the Jarawa tested positive for coronavirus: "The Andaman authorities must act urgently to prevent the virus reaching more Great Andamanese and to prevent infection in the other tribes," they announced. *Times*, 27 Aug 2020.

### MASKED ROBBERY?

An Israeli jewellery company is making what it says will be the world's most expensive coronavirus mask. The 18-carat-gold mask, decorated with 3,600 white and black diamonds and fitted with top-of-the-range N99 filters, will cost £1.1 million. However, it may not be practical to wear, since it weighs in at 270g





**ABOVE:** Crowds at Nottingham's Goose Fair in 1873 (left) and 2010 (right). The Covid-19 outbreak has seen the first peacetime cancellation of the fair since 1646. **BELOW:** Jubilee and Munin, two of the Tower ravens struggling with lockdown.

(9.5oz), nearly 100 times more than a standard surgical mask. The company refused to identify the buyer, but said he was a Chinese businessman living in the United States. [AP] 7 Aug 2020.

## HENS REHOMED

A charity that rehomes chickens says it has received over 52,000 requests for hens since lockdown began. Fresh Start for Hens saves birds that would otherwise be slaughtered, having reached the end of their peak laying years after 72 weeks. The charity takes the chickens from farmers and rehomes them with private households. Operations director Jaki Hann said the huge demand was initiated after the egg shortage in March. Despite coronavirus restrictions easing and shops having refilled their shelves, the charity still has a lengthy waiting list. "This week I'm organising a handover for 332 hens," said Ms Hann. "I'm also trying to find homes for 800 ducks from a Somerset farm." BBC News, 20 Aug 2020.

## GOOSE FAIR CANCELLED

Nottingham's 700-year-old annual carnival has only been cancelled once before in peacetime: in 1646, because of bubonic plague. Now, almost four centuries later, the legendary Goose Fair has been cancelled due to coronavirus. The five-day October fair attracts 420,000 people to its 500 temporary amusements each year. It is considered of such economic importance to the city

that, even though it was called off during the first four years of World War II, it was reinstated in 1943. A local councillor said it had not been a decision taken lightly. "If we did go ahead and, three or four weeks later, we find the fair caused a spike [in coronavirus infections], that would be a terrible thing," he said, adding: "We know how well-loved the event is and what a boost it would have been for morale in the city."

It is not known exactly when the Goose Fair first began, but it is thought to date back to at least 1284 when a royal charter was granted by King Edward I referring to a city fair in Nottingham. Its name is derived from its origins as a livestock event when thousands of geese would be brought into the city. Independent, 22 Aug 2020.

## STRAYING RAVENS

A lack of tourists at the Tower of London is making the ravens bored and lonely, causing them to venture away, says Ravenmaster Christopher Skaife. The highly intelligent birds thrive on contact with people, and if under-stimulated, will seek entertainment elsewhere. Although notices discourage visitors from feeding the birds, the Ravenmaster said that the ravens miss having

overflowing bins to rummage through, or people offering them snacks. He has encouraged the Beefeaters to throw the ravens their leftover food.

The Tower closed on 20 March at the start of the coronavirus lockdown and reopened in late July, but few tourists have returned. Visitor numbers usually exceed 15,000 in summer, but because of the pandemic they have fallen to

fewer than 800 a day this year. Consequently, the birds are restless for more company. The seven ravens, Jubilee, Harris, Gripp, Rocky, Erin, Poppy and Merlina, are free to roam the Tower precincts during the day.

Legend (invented in the 19th century) says the kingdom and the Tower itself will fall should the six resident ravens leave. There are seven in total – the required six, plus a spare one.

"If the ravens were to leave, the tower would crumble to dust," said Ravenmaster Skaife. "The ravens have always been so important... because they've been surrounded by myths and legends. We really need people to come back to help the ravens." For more on the Tower ravens, see FT206:30-36, 367:10-11, 382:6-7. Guardian, 20 Aug 2020.



## SIDELINES...

### DRUNK TANK

A Russian man stole a tank from a motorsport training ground before driving it through a forest and into Apatity, a town just below the Arctic Circle. Struggling to do a three-point turn in a narrow street, he rammed the vehicle into a supermarket window, also crushing a parked car. He then climbed through the shop's broken window and stole a bottle of wine. Witnesses said the man appeared to be drunk. Independent, 11 Jan 2018.

### UNORTHODOX SLOG

A cricketer blasted eight sixes during a Twenty20 match at Pembroke Cricket Club in Dublin, one of which sailed out of the ground and landed in the car park where it smashed into his own car. Kevin O'Brien, well-known for his destructive batting, hit 82 off 37 balls to guide Leinster Lightning to a 24-run win over North-West Warriors. Guardian, 28 Aug 2020.

### COLONEL LICKED

The famous Kentucky Fried Chicken slogan "finger-lickin' good" has been suspended because of the coronavirus epidemic. A KFC official said the 64-year-old catchphrase "doesn't feel quite right." [CNN] 20 Aug 2020.

### NAZI GRAVE OPENED

The unmarked grave of top Nazi Reinhard Heidrich was opened last year, but Germans are mystified as nothing was disturbed or removed. Those responsible must have had inside knowledge, since the grave, in Berlin's Invalids' Cemetery, bears no indication that it is the last resting place of Heydrich, who chaired the January 1942 Wannsee Conference where the Holocaust was planned. He was assassinated by Czechoslovak commandoes later that year. D.Mail, 17 Dec 2019.



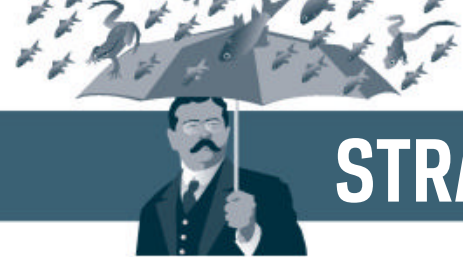
HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

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## SIDELINES...

### BOUNCY GANNET

A Norfolk resident was surprised to find a huge seabird in her North Wootton garden, resting on her trampoline. Dawn Austin called the RSPCA who confirmed it to be a gannet, more commonly found in the North Atlantic. The animal welfare charity believe the bird had been blown off course. *BBC News*, 5 June 2020.

### TEPES' DES RES

Bran Castle in Transylvania is on the market. The former home of Vlad Dracula (aka Vlad Tepes, the Impaler), the Wallachian ruler thought to be the inspiration for Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is available for \$66m (£50m). It is 800 years old and has 57 rooms, but no indoor plumbing. *buzznicked.com*, 3 June 2020.

### BAD DOG

A curious dog that grabbed hold of a fibre optic cable running between a courthouse and a Justice Court building in Mississippi caused over \$7,000 (£5,250) worth of damage after chewing it to pieces. The cable was mostly elevated, but at one point lay close to the ground. The sheriff said he had not yet made any arrests, but had a suspect in mind after viewing CCTV images. *apnews.com*, 26 Aug 2020.

### FLYING MYSTERY MAN

A man in a jetpack has been spotted flying thousands of feet in the air above Los Angeles. An American Airlines pilot called air traffic control to report an unidentified flying person at the same altitude as his plane, 3,000ft (914m). Another pilot, on a Southwest Airlines flight also saw the flying jetpack man. The Federal Aviation Administration are investigating. *nbcnews.com*, 1 Sep 2020.

### FALLING SNAKES

Two huge snakes crashed through the ceiling of a Brisbane house, startling the owner when he returned home. The 2.9m (9.5ft) and 2.5m (8.2ft) carpet pythons had fallen into the kitchen. When Australian professional snake catcher Steve Brown arrived, he found one snake sitting by the front door and another in a bedroom. "These snakes were two of the fattest I've seen." *[CNN]* 1 Sep 2020.

## MEDICAL BAG | Three cases of corpse revival, plus fish tank dangers and the boy with three penises



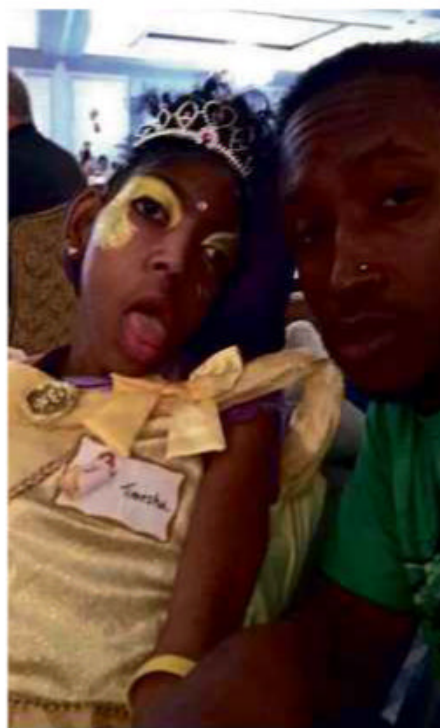
FSTOP123 / GETTY IMAGES

**BELOW:** Timesha Beauchamp was declared dead, regaining consciousness in a funeral home as she was about to be embalmed.

### BODY BAGGED

A 20-year-old woman declared dead at her Detroit home opened her eyes at a funeral home just as she was about to be embalmed. An ambulance had been called to the home of Timesha Beauchamp. For 30 minutes, paramedics attempted resuscitation without success, then consulted a doctor who, based on information given him by the ambulance crew, pronounced her to be dead. However, at the James H Cole funeral home, she was found to be still alive over an hour later, inside a body bag. "Our staff confirmed she was breathing," said the funeral home, who called an emergency medical crew. Geoffrey Fieger, a lawyer hired by Ms Beauchamp's family to look into potential negligence charges, told reporters: "They were about to embalm her, which is most frightening, had she not had her eyes open... The funeral home unzipping the body bag, literally that's what happened to Timesha, and seeing her alive with her eyes open." He added: "They would have begun draining her blood, to be very, very frank about it."

Ms Beauchamp has had



cerebral palsy since birth and requires three breathing treatments a day. She had apparently undergone a seizure while at home performing her usual morning routine: eat, change clothes and have a breathing treatment. She was not breathing and her lips had lost colour, hence the assumption that she had died. At the time of writing, she remained hospitalised and in a critical condition. *detroitnews.com*, *theguardian.com*, 25 Aug 2020.

### LIE DOWN, GRANNY

Russian grandmother Zinaida Kononova, 81, was pronounced dead after undergoing surgery to remove an intestinal obstruction. After being informed of the sad news, the pensioner's family began planning her funeral. On 14 August, almost seven hours after her body had been taken to Gorshechensky Central District Hospital's morgue, a worker "got the shock of her life" when she found the grandmother sprawled on the floor, having attempted to climb off the morgue table and escape. Hearing the commotion, an ambulance driver then arrived, hoping to discover what was happening. He described having seen the "frightened" morgue worker saying: "Grandma, lie down. Granny, be quiet." Initially he thought the morgue worker had gone "crazy" and was talking to the dead, but then he saw the pensioner grabbing the woman's hand and pleading for help.

Covered in blankets, Mrs Kononova was rushed to intensive care, while hospital staff contacted her niece Tatiana, telling her: "We have an unusual situation. She is alive!" Tatiana





rushed to the hospital, and, while happy to learn her aunt was alive, asked the doctors: “How could this happen?”

Apparently, Mrs Kononova had been registered clinically dead for 15 minutes. “She initially did not recognise me or recall that she had had surgery,” said her niece. “But she talked about her old knee problem.” A doctor and an anaesthetist later admitted that they had sent the grandmother to the morgue only one hour and 20 minutes after her ‘death’ instead of the stipulated two hours. The hospital’s head doctor, Roman Kondratenko, has been suspended pending an investigation, while Mrs Kononova’s relatives are planning to sue.

Acting hospital head Alexander Vlasov explained that the pensioner had undergone resuscitation measures for 30 minutes, with no response. “As a result, the resuscitation doctor established biological death,” he said. “The anaesthetist is very worried. She feels very bad and we are afraid for her. Every person makes mistakes.” *mirror.co.uk*, 24 Aug 2020.

## WASHED UP

A 12-year-old Indonesian girl declared dead in a hospital “came back to life”. Siti Masfufah Wardah was officially pronounced deceased after suffering from diabetes and organ complications, but she awoke while her family were cleaning her body preparatory to the funeral, before dying again

shortly afterwards.

The girl had been admitted to hospital on 18 August in the Indonesian province of East Java, and was pronounced dead at 6pm the same day. Her body was taken home at 7pm so that family members could begin the funeral preparations. “When her body was being bathed, her body temperature suddenly warmed,” her father Ngasiyo told a reporter. “And her closed eyes suddenly reopened. And we found her heart was beating again and her body moved.” Doctors were called and the girl was given respiratory assistance and oxygen, but she passed away again one hour later.

Almost 90 per cent of Indonesia’s population is Muslim, and part of Islamic funeral ritual stipulates that it is the family’s responsibility to wash the body according to specific rules.

So-called ‘corpse revival’, also known as Lazarus syndrome or return of spontaneous circulation (ROSC), occurs in patients who have ‘died’ of heart failure. 82 per cent of ROSC incidents occur 10 minutes after a person has been confirmed dead. *mirror.co.uk*, 24 Aug 2020.

For other recent cases of Lazarus syndrome, see FT389:6-7.

## THREE’S A CROWD

Surgeons at a Mumbai hospital successfully operated on a young boy with three penises but no anus. One of the boy’s penises was able to pass urine while two

of them had erectile tissue. Dr Paras Kothari, head of paediatric surgery at Sion Hospital, explained that the youngster was suffering from diphallia, a condition so rare that just 100 cases have been reported since 1609.

Another Sion Hospital doctor, Dr Vishesh Dixit, described how there had been “a huge soft bony mass and tissue to which the penises were attached. However, the anus was absent. Two years ago, after his birth, the doctors in Uttar Pradesh had created an incision on the lower left side of his stomach, in a procedure called colostomy, to let the excreta pass through a tube. The two functional penises were fused into one by wrapping a mass of skin around them. Further, an anal path was created through the boy’s rectum to facilitate the passage of excreta.” Further surgery was necessary to close the incision in his stomach. Dr Kothari added: “The incision through which he currently passes excreta will only be closed after the anal path that has been created by us heals and is capable of function.” *ibtimes.com*, 27 Aug 2015.

## TOXIC FISH TANK FUMES

A family of five were rushed to hospital when they became seriously ill after Katie Stevenson and husband Mark cleaned out their fish tank. When cleansing agents came into contact with coral inside the tank, the coral began to give off palytoxin, “the second deadliest poison known to man”. Ten minutes later, the married couple and their three girls, aged one, seven and 11, all began coughing as their temperatures rose. When Mark’s temperature soared to 42°C (107.6°F), he dialled 111. Paramedics wearing protective masks arrived and cordoned off their home in Telford, Shropshire. Believed to be one of only a few recorded cases of palytoxin poisoning in the UK, it led to the adults’ hospitalisation for one week (their daughters were allowed home after a day). “It was terrifying”, said Katie. “The whole A&E was isolated. They said if we’d gone to sleep we wouldn’t have woken”. *Metro*, 8 Aug 2019.

## SIDELINES...

### MAGIC BUS

The world’s longest bus route, linking India to the UK, will be launched in 2021. The travel company behind the venture says their luxury 20-seat bus will start in New Delhi before crossing Myanmar, Thailand and Laos, then China, Central Asia and westward towards Moscow. The final leg of the journey crosses Eastern and Central Europe before arriving in London via Brussels. The drive mirrors the 1970s ‘Hippie Trail’ that came to an end after the Iranian revolution and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. *D.Telegraph*, 29 Aug 2020.

### SAGE ADVICE

Firefighters called to reports of a smoke alarm going off in a Long Eaton, Derbyshire, house arrived to find a man dressed in a “religious outfit” who had carried out an exorcism to get rid of “an unwanted presence”. A spokesperson for Stapleford fire station said: “This was a false alarm caused by smoke from an exorcism. Sage had been lit and triggered the smoke detection system.” *ilkestonadvertiser.co.uk*, 17 Aug 2020.

### LOST AND FOUND

A missing cat was found sitting next to its own missing poster in a Salisbury shop window, two weeks after going missing. *Metro*, 27 Apr 2020.

### ROAD SAFETY BOARS

Wild boars have become so accustomed to Berlin city life that they have learned how to cross the road safely. “I never cease to be astonished by how wild boars and their young deliberately choose pedestrian crossings to cross roads,” said Berlin’s wildlife commissioner Derk Ehlert. *Times*, 14 Mar 2020.



ABOVE: Katie Stevenson and her family had to be rushed to hospital after the coral in their fish tank began giving off deadly palytoxin fumes.



MARTIN ROSS





# STRANGE DAYS

## SIDELINES...

### WEIGHED OFF

A beef restaurant in central China has apologised for encouraging diners to weigh themselves before ordering food. The policy was introduced after the launch of 'Clean Plate Campaign', a government initiative against food waste. The restaurant asked diners to enter their measurements into an app that would then suggest menu items accordingly. Signs reading "be thrifty and diligent, promote empty plates" and "operation empty plate" were pinned up on the walls. *BBC News*, 17 Aug 2020.

### DECADENT DOGS

North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un has ordered all pet dogs in the capital Pyongyang to be confiscated, because they represent Western "decadence" and a "tainted trend [of] bourgeois ideology". It was believed that authorities confiscating pet dogs have them put down, but it has emerged that some are sent to state zoos while others, in light of North Korea's chronic food shortage, are given to restaurants for their meat. *D.Mirror*, 17 Aug 2020.

### CONGRESSMAN COWED

A Virginia court has ruled against Republican congressman Devin Nunes's bid to sue Twitter over allegedly defamatory remarks made about him by satirical accounts pretending to be his mother and a cow. Nunes cited @DevinNunesMom and @DevinCow in his complaint, with screenshots and quotes he claimed were evidence of a conspiracy against him. But Judge John Marshall refused to recognise Twitter "as the publisher or speaker of the content provided by others". *edition.cnn.com*, 25 June 2020.

### SPEED TRAPPED

A drug dealer named Jack Speed was arrested by Birmingham police after a 100mph (161km/ph) chase. The 21-year-old came to a halt after crashing into a wall, having previously tried to reverse into a police car, swerve round a bus, race through a red light at 70mph (112km/ph) and drive the wrong way around a roundabout. Police found a backpack full of cannabis and a 12in (30cm) wooden baton in his car. *dailymail.co.uk*, 7 July 2020.

## MYSTERY BOX

A New York farmer finds a mysterious safe on his farm – but decides not to open it

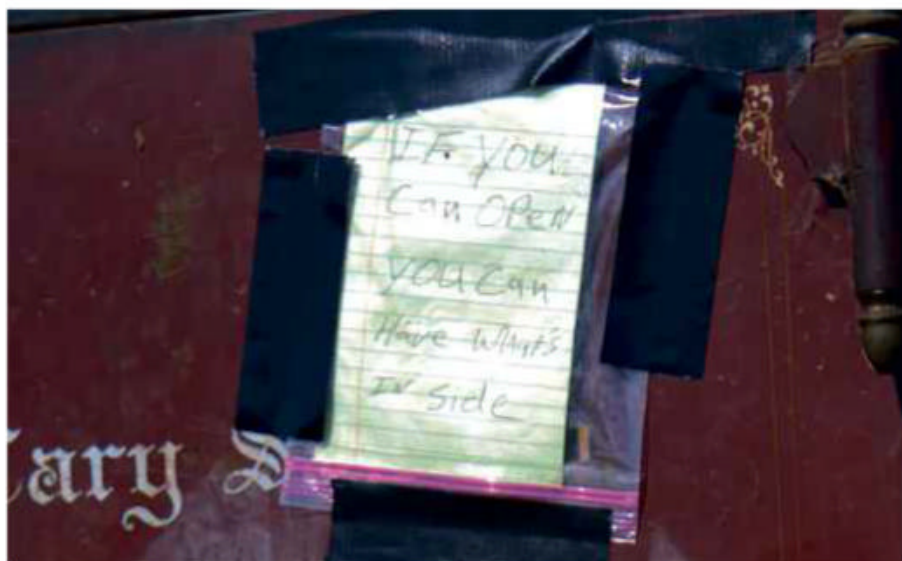


ABOVE AND BELOW: The mysterious safe in Kirk Mathes's field. BOTTOM: Mr Mathes drives the safe to a secret location.

A mysterious safe that appeared on a New York State farmer's property with a note attached is to remain a mystery for the time being. The large safe, estimated to weigh between 500lb and 600lb (225-272kg), appeared in a field on Kirk Mathes's farm in Barre with a note that read: "If you can open this, you can have what's inside." Mr Mathes said deputies had to disperse a crowd of people attempting to force it open. "They took a sledgehammer to it, knocked off the dial and handle," he told reporters. "They worked on the hinges, kind of beat it up."

He has since moved the safe to a secret location. "My personal feeling is, leave it as a mystery," he explained, adding it has proven to be a welcome distraction. "If you open it, the show is over. In these times, with the virus and the politics, it might get people a chance to set their problems or troubles aside and have a lot of fun talking about it."

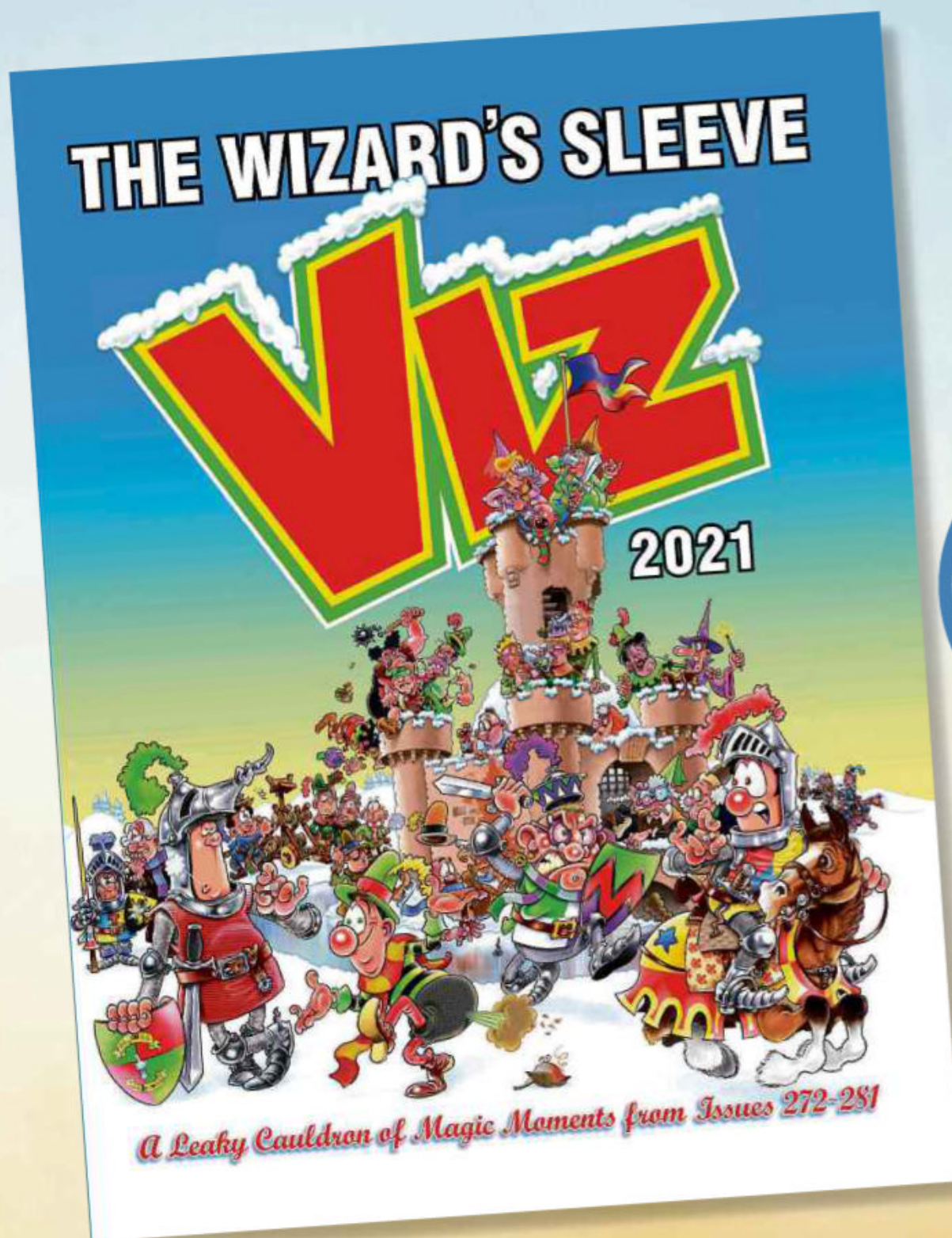
Town committee member Cindy Vallieshout said: "It could be holding millions of dollars. It could have confetti in there." Her committee is currently in discussions to establish a local history museum where the safe could be exhibited. "You have no idea, so just dream." *[UPI]* 21 Aug 2020.







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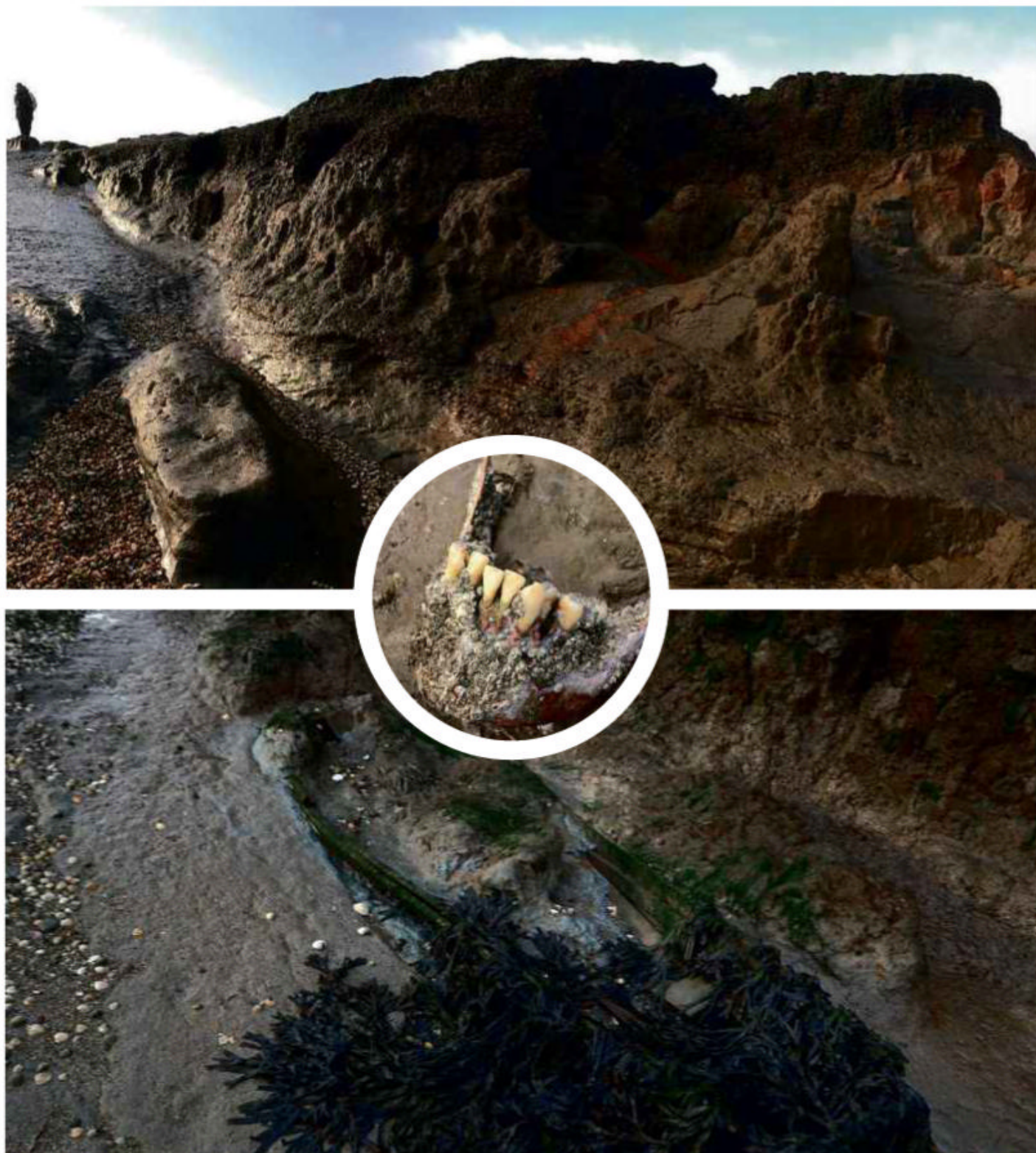
## STRANGE LANDSCAPES | Kent's grisly island of bones and Siberia's peninsula of gigantic craters

### DEADMAN'S ISLAND

A haunting wilderness on the north coast of Kent would be a fascinating if grisly destination for a day trip – but visitors are banned due to its being a recognised bird breeding and nesting site, designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest by its owner, Natural England. Deadman's Island, just off the river Medway and opposite Queenborough on the Isle of Sheppey, is littered with human remains, having been used as a burial ground for those who died aboard prison ships over 200 years ago. The 'hulks', as the vessels were called, were decommissioned naval warships used to house convicts awaiting transportation to Australia, and were immortalised by Charles Dickens, whose *Great Expectations* (1861) features an escapee from one such boat, Abel Magwitch.

Rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and lower tides have resulted in numerous rotting wooden coffins, skulls and bone fragments protruding from the six feet (2m) of mud that previously covered the area. Indeed, the island was once covered by the sea and is still a dangerous place to walk. A BBC team explored the site for an *Inside Out South East* programme, broadcast in 2017. Its director, Sam Supple, said of the island: "It is like being on the set of a horror film. It looks so surreal, it's like an art department has designed it. There are open coffins and bones everywhere." Presenter Natalie Graham added: "What I saw there will stay with me forever. This is a really strange sight. I would imagine there can't be anywhere on Earth like this."

The island is completely uninhabited, and has generated local folklore which warns of hounds with glaring red eyes who eat the heads of buried corpses. Open coffins and scattered human remains litter a river bank at the location known as 'Coffin Bay'. Convicts on board the floating prisons who had



ABOVE: The marshes of Deadman's Island in Kent are littered with the bones and coffins of convicts who died aboard the prison hulks of the Medway.

died of cholera or other diseases were buried in unmarked graves on the island.

Similar human remains have also been discovered at nearby Chatham, where French prisoners were held during the Napoleonic wars; those who died were buried in nearby marshes. When their bones were revealed by erosion they were exhumed and reburied. It has been suggested that the remains on Deadman's Island should be similarly reburied, but the treacherous terrain would make this difficult, with a constantly changing seascape often washing the convicts' bones out to sea. [kentlive.co.uk](http://kentlive.co.uk), 22 Aug 2020.

PHOTOS: BBC / INSIDE OUT SOUTH EAST





## SIBERIAN CRATERS

A huge 50 metre- (164ft) deep crater has appeared in north-western Siberia, having been discovered by an airborne TV crew on an unrelated assignment. The crater is believed to have been produced by a massive explosion, the result of a build-up of methane gas due to thawing permafrost in the tundra. The giant hole is the 17th such crater appearing over the last six years in the region, which has seen increased summer temperatures year on year.

After the film crew's find, a group of scientists made an expedition to the Yamal Peninsula to examine the large cylindrical crater. Dr Evgeny Chuvilin of the Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology said it was "striking in its size and grandeur" and had been caused by "colossal forces of nature". Professor Vasily Bogoyavlensky of the Russian Oil and Gas Research Institute in Moscow said the hole was unusual. "It holds a lot of additional scientific information, which I am not yet ready to disclose," he said cryptically. He explained that these craters appear after explosions in "gas-saturated cavities... formed in the permafrost" and has also previously claimed that drilling for natural gas in the Yamal region may be a factor in the eruptions. He is also concerned about the risk of a disaster should a blast take place beneath a gas pipeline, industrial production facility or residential area.

Some of the explosions have occurred in swelling mounds or *pingos* in the tundra where the gas builds up under a thick cap of ice. "In a number of areas, *pingos* – as we see both from satellite data and with our own eyes during helicopter inspections – literally prop up gas pipes," Prof Bogoyavlensky has said previously. "In some places they jack up the gas pipes... they seem to begin to slightly bend these pipes."

Russian scientists call the craters hydrolaccoliths or *bulgunnyakhs*, but have warned that their study of the unusual phenomenon is still at an early stage, as it only became known six years ago. [www.news.com.au](http://www.news.com.au), 31 Aug 2020.



**TOP:** The latest crater, filmed by an airborne TV crew. **ABOVE CENTRE:** An earlier crater on the Yamal Peninsula; this one appeared in 2014. **ABOVE:** A picture taken in November that year shows a scientist descending into the giant crater

VASILY BOGOYAVLENSKY / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

RUSSIAN CENTRE OF ARCTIC EXPLORATION / VLADIMIR PUSHKAREV / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES





# Lyfe, but not as we know it...

DAVID HAMBLING wonders if Perseverance's Mars mission has a sufficiently broad definition of life

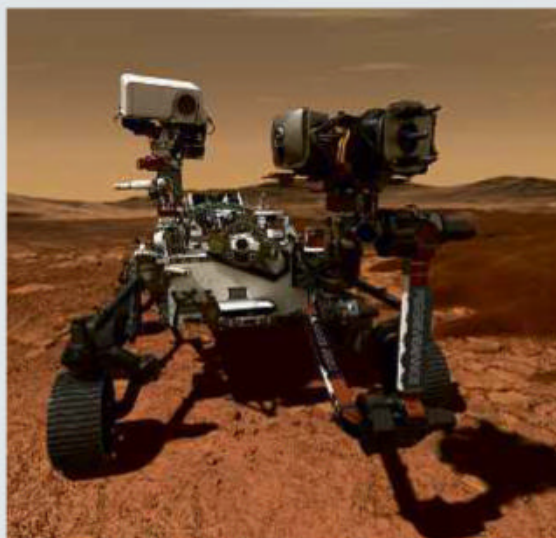
NASA's 2020 Perseverance Rover Mission has set off on a mission to find signs of historic life on Mars. The mission has given new urgency to the debate about what constitutes life, and whether our limited experience means we may be looking for it in the wrong places. Since we are only familiar with the Earthly variety, our search might be like that of a blinkered traveller who believes food is only found where there are golden arches.

While the 1976 Viking landers were looking for living bacteria in the soils – and some argue that they may have found them (see **FT389:12**) – Perseverance's mission is much less optimistic. The goal this time is to find fossils, on the assumption that life on Mars is likely to be extinct because the surface is now so hostile. This is why Jezero Crater has been selected as the landing site: NASA scientists believe that over three billion years ago the crater was filled with water, and the crater lake may have been home to all sorts of aquatic life. Deposits of carbonate minerals around the crater rim – “like a bathtub ring,” as NASA's description has it – suggest that this may be a rich hunting ground for the fossilised remains of seashells, corals and other creatures which incorporate minerals into their body structure.

Is this, though, an example of Earthly short-sightedness? Seeing a lake and assuming there will be shells might seem as presumptuous as seeing a canal and assuming singing gondoliers with straw hats, but in this case there is some justification. Carl Sagan once described himself as a carbon chauvinist and a water chauvinist when it came to alien life, because these two substances are so essential to life as we know it.

All life on Earth needs water, which carries out an essential role as a solvent for molecules to move around in. Being an almost universal solvent, water is almost uniquely suited for this task, and “follow the water” is NASA's guiding policy in its search for extraterrestrial life. This is also behind the idea that habitable planets must be in the ‘Goldilocks Zone,’ with the right temperature range for liquid water.

Ammonia is often put forward as a possible substitute for water, but, as astrobiologist Roger Buick of the University of Washington puts it, “It wouldn't work very well.” The bonds between ammonia molecules are much weaker than those in water, and it is doubtful whether it could



## Bartlett and Wong suggest a hypothetical lyfe-form powered by mechanical energy

concentrate other molecules by a repellent effect – the reproduction of DNA, for example, depends on this effect. Another obvious drawback is that ammonia is highly flammable in the presence of oxygen; an ammonia sea would burn like oil slicks in an oxygen atmosphere.

Similarly, all known life is based on carbon. Its ability to form multiple chemical bonds means it is far more capable of forming complex compounds with elaborate structures than other elements. In fact, chemistry is often divided into two fields – organic chemistry, meaning the chemistry of carbon, and inorganic which covers literally the other 117 elements.

Silicon is an old science-fiction favourite as an alternative basis for life, being adjacent to carbon in the table of elements and sharing many of the same qualities. There are some problems though. Unlike carbon-hydrogen molecules, long-chain silicon-hydrogen molecules are unstable. We carbon-based lifeforms exhale carbon dioxide, a soluble gas; anyone with a silicon metabolism needs to move silicon dioxide (sand) around inside its body, which is a much greater challenge.

This type of analysis leads NASA to seek out traces of life in places where there is, or has been, liquid water, and where the type of carbon chemistry we are familiar with on Earth could occur. It makes sense to concentrate on what we know works; but our explorations may go right past other

types of living thing without even noticing them.

Against the narrowing of horizons proposed by some scientists, in a recent paper two Californian scientists, Stuart Bartlett and Michael Wong, associated with Caltech and NASA respectively, introduce the concept of ‘lyfe’ (pronounced ‘loif’). This includes not just the sort of life that we find on Earth but other chemistries as well. While NASA currently sees life as being “a self-sustaining chemical system capable of Darwinian evolution,” Bartlett and Wong go wider.

The four pillars of lyfe are dissipation, autocatalysis, homeostasis and learning. Dissipation is moving energy around, fundamental to any sort of metabolism, while autocatalysis covers replication and growth. Homeostasis allows an organism to regulate its internal conditions (for example, the way humans regulate internal temperature), and learning means recording information in its broadest sense – evolution is given as an example of a learning process. By going wider, lyfe offers a way out from endless debate about how and where life on Earth originated, whether it was hydrothermal vents, the surface of underground rocks, or shallow surface pools. Each of these theories has supporters who want to look for life in space in a similar environment.

For contrast, Bartlett and Wong suggest a hypothetical lyfe-form called a mechanotroph, powered by mechanical energy rather than sunlight or chemical reactions, a single-celled creature anchored to a rock in flowing liquid. It has a tail, like many swimming bacteria on Earth, but in the mechanotroph it functions in reverse as a dynamo, taking in energy rather than expending it. The authors point out that such a being is hypothetical but, since nobody has ever looked for it, “it may be hiding in plain sight on Earth.”

Science appears to be leading us in two different directions. On the one hand, greater understanding of biochemistry means we appreciate just how delicately balanced known life is, how dependent on the particular properties of proteins, membranes, and metabolism. On the other, it opens up more possibilities of radically different lyfe forms.

The truth is that we really know little about what might be waiting out there. We will not know for sure until Perseverance or its successors find something... or it finds us.

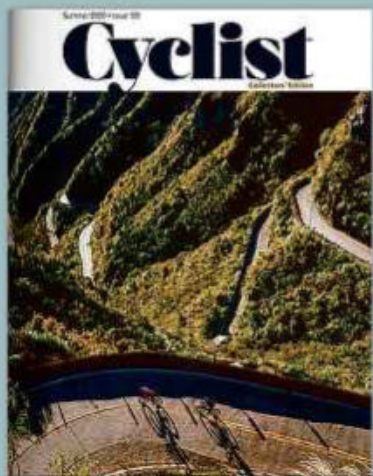
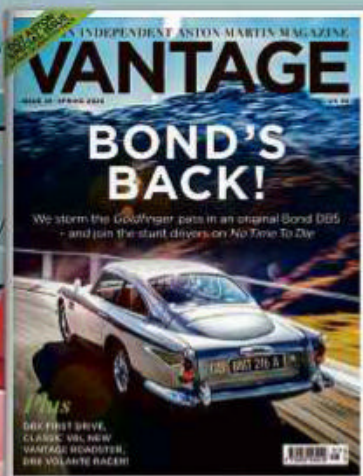
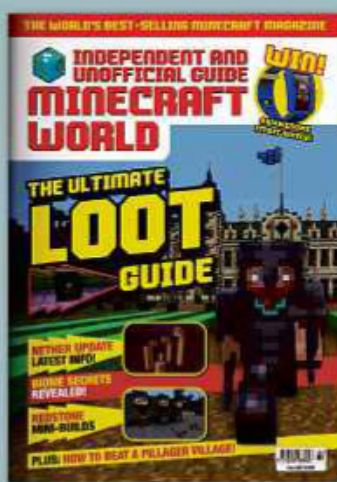


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PAUL DEVEREUX digs up the latest discoveries, with a special emphasis on the ever-present dead

## THEY WALK AGAIN

Pandemics and epidemics have always been with us – at least back to Mesopotamian times, according to information on the cuneiform tablets left behind, and doubtless earlier. A novel angle on old plagues is found in a new study of rare but curious types of burials – namely, prone, face-down, interments. In the paper, researchers studying 95 examples of the phenomenon at over 60 locations in German-speaking Europe during mediæval and Early Modern times has found a potential link with epidemics. During the Middle Ages such burials seem to have been pious expressions of penance, but in Europe in the 1300s something changed – there was an increase in face-down burials, including some on the outskirts of consecrated Christian burial grounds. This coincided with plagues that swept across Europe, beginning in 1347.

But why prone burials? Well, they could have been intended as apotropaic efforts to deal with the undead – with revenants. (This is possibly akin to other kinds of actions performed on certain corpses in Slavic countries to prevent them wandering as vampires, or *vrykolakes*.) It is suggested that as people died at an almost unmanageable rate in the plagues, people became more openly assailed by the disturbing presence of decomposing bodies. Corpses can shift as intestines fill with gas, causing disturbing noises. Hair and nails seem to grow as the flesh around them shrinks. Anthropologist Amelie Alterauge, one of the paper's authors, noted that in German-speaking regions lore told of the *nachzehrer* ("corpse devourers"), corpses that consumed themselves and their burial shrouds, and sucked the life from their surviving relatives in the process. She somewhat vividly comments that decaying bodies can move and "make smacking sounds" so it "might seem as if they're eating themselves and their burial shrouds." Also feared at the time were *wiedergänger* – "those who walk again".

The study also reveals further incidence of prone burials, often on the edges of Christian cemeteries, up to the 17th century. Again, the researchers think they would probably have been associated with epidemics. For instance, the prone burial of a middle-aged man in an isolated part of a Swiss cemetery was dated to between 1630 and 1650 from coins found in the grave. This period coincided with a series of plagues in Switzerland. The next step, say the paper's authors, is to take DNA samples from a range of prone burials to check if



the association of face-down burials with outbreaks of disease can be more securely pinned down. *National Geographic*, 3 Sept 2020. Original paper in *PLoS One* 15(8), 2020.

## THE DEAD ALL AROUND

Continuing our less than cheery theme, we turn this time to evidence that some Neolithic monuments may have been built as 'upside down' houses for the dead. This is according to a new, meticulous study of the Maeshowe chambered cairn (c.2,800 BC) on the mainland of the Orkney Islands in Scotland. The mound contains passages and chambers built from crafted slabs of flagstone. The interior contains a 36ft (11m) long passageway (pictured at right) that leads to a squarish chamber. The study, by the University of the Highlands and Islands, proposes that side chambers within the structure were designed in an inverted fashion as netherworlds for the dead to pass on into the afterlife. The investigator is Jay van der Reijden, who has researched communally built dry-stone Neolithic tombs – referred to as 'houses for the dead' given the similar layout to domestic dwellings. "The wall-stones are like wallpapers, and when you repeatedly hang them upside down in distinct locations patterns become discernible," she explains. "The swaps include the reversal of multiple architectural features normally placed on the right-hand side being on the left only inside the side chambers. The interpretation is that the side chambers are built to be within the netherworld, with the main chamber walls acting as membranes, separating this life

and the next, and that the internal walling material is conceived to physically represent the underworld." *Archaeology*, 4 Sept; *Phys. Org News*, 7 Sept 2020. Original paper in *Archaeology Review from Cambridge (ARC)* 35.1, 4 Sept 2020.

Another prehistoric custom concerning the dead comes from Bronze Age Britain. Archaeologists have been studying what seems to have been a commonplace handling of human bones there. One example was a whistle made from a carved and polished human thigh bone found with a man buried near Stonehenge. Another case involved a woman buried near Stockton-on-Tees, who was interred with skulls and limb bones from at least three other people who died an estimated 60-170 years before her.

"Bones belonging to significant ancestors were curated as relics, and even made into artefacts, some of which may have been used or displayed in the homes of the living," says lead investigator Professor Joanna Bruck. "Radiocarbon-dating of curated bones suggests that Bronze Age people's sense of identity and belonging was based on their links to known kin who had died in the past few decades rather than to distant and anonymous ancestors."

"This is the first evidence we have for an established Bronze Age tradition of curating human remains for substantial lengths of time, over several generations," adds Dr Thomas Booth, who carbon-dated the bones at the University of Bristol. "There wasn't a mindset that human remains go in the ground and you forget about them. They were always present among the living." *Guardian*, 1 Sept 2020. Original article in *Antiquity*.







# CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 252: SCORNOGRAPHY

“Every man with a bellyful of classics is an enemy to the human race” – Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (1934)

A sequel to **FT345:15**, inspired by, and indebted to, Matthew Parris’s *SCORN: The Wittiest and Wickedest Insults in Human History* (2016). Parris includes a smattering of classical authors. Apart from some political and sexual rants from Aristophanes, too long to quote and partly covered in **FT349:15**, and a typically Catullus (*Poems* 99, v20) jab (“You foul saliva of a pissed-over whore”), they are – albeit witty – surprisingly tame; for stronger stuff, see Amy Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humour* (1983).

His ‘Ancients, Primitives, and Folk-Lore’ round-up offers richer (i.e. nastier) pickings, ranging from ancient Egypt via Greece and Rome to mediæval England and multitudinous other countries, both graffiti (predictable) and literary (Martial neck-and-neck with Catullus).

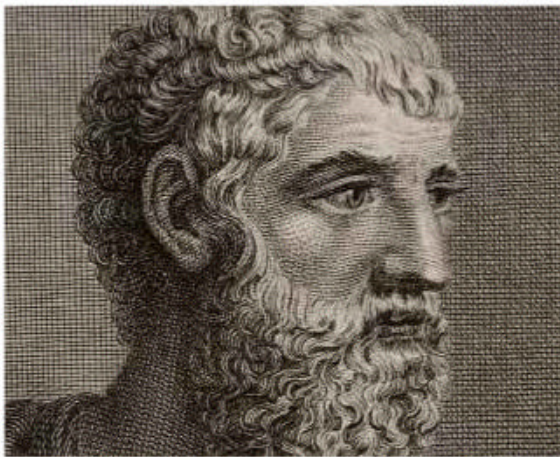
An Egyptian tomb’s (c. 2300 BC) “Come Here, You Fucker”, is commonly thought the world’s earliest recorded insult, just as ‘RogerFuckByTheNavel’ (official outlaw’s nickname, 1310) seems the first English use of the now ubiquitous F-word.

Graffiti (many from Pompeii) are modern looking sexual crudities, notable alike for their tone and illiteracy – “Sabina, you give no-good blow-jobs” exemplifies both. They needed the Latin lesson given by John Cleese in *Life of Brian*, though might have responded like Sigismund (1433-7): “I am the Roman emperor and am above grammar.”

For a rival example of (im)polite English discourse, compare AA Gill’s letter to Taki (*Spectator*, 30 July 1999): “Go fuck yourself, you smelly dago lesbian.” Mind you, Taki partly brought this on himself, unlike outstanding ubiquitous English classicist Mary Beard, recipient of the vilest trolling – I disdain to give examples, and MB is quite capable of looking after herself.

Aristophanes (*Women of Parliament*, vv1169-74) invented the longest word in Greek, indeed in any language – *Guinness Book of Records*:

*Lopadotemachosselachogaleo  
kraniroleipsanodrimhypotrimmatosil  
phioparamelitokatakechymeno  
kichiepiakossyphop hattoperisteralek  
tryonoptekaphalliokiglopeiolagoiosiraio lob  
aphettraganopyerygon.*  
(PHEW!)



YouTube has someone galloping through this 172-word monster in 35 seconds. Though as rich in compounds as German, modern Greek doesn’t come close. It means a multi-ingredient salad. Though not a full-blown troll, in context it is somewhat disparaging, perhaps the ancestor of shorter cognates such as “You are ugly as a salad” (Bulgarian), *Kastravec* (Albanian = ‘Gourd’; cf. Valley Girl-speak “Out of your Gourd”), or (my favourite) “You Out-of-Focus-Eggplant” (Japanese). Plautus (*The Persian*, vv703-5) offers stiff Roman competition with:

*Vaniloquidorusvirginesven  
donidesnugiopiloquidesargent  
umexterebronidestedigniloquidesnu  
didespalponidesquodsemelarrripides  
nunquamerripides.*

Boiling down to:

“LyingSpeakerusGirlSeller  
inksyTriflinggreatTalkerSilver  
SqueezerouterCoinWheedlerouter  
WhatyouhaveonceGrabbedSteinnever  
LetitgoBerg”.

The last part of this is reproduced from Paul Nixon’s 1917 Loeb translation, betraying the casual antisemitism endemic in those times.

This sesquipedalian style has a long innings. Byzantine scholar John Tzetzes (12th-century) called one rival “Bull-father, moonstruck son of a goat,” while another is dismissed as “Ghostly Presence, Scabbed with camel-disease, cat-faced, anchovy-eyed, with the voice of a weeping eunuch.” Makes modern academic spite look insipid. As does Constantine the Rhodian’s compound accusation (occupies 34 lines in P Matranga’s *Anecdota Græca*, Rome, 1850, p624-5) of politician Leo Choerosphactes for every conceivable (and inconceivable) form of vice.

Renaissance scholar Julius Cæsar Scaliger – there’s a name for you – dubbed the English “Perfidious, haughty, savage,

LEFT: Aristophanes, among other things the inventor of the longest word in Greek.

disdainful, stupid, slothful, inhospitable, inhuman.” Approved East German abuse of the English (1953) ran to: “Paralytic sycophants, effete betrayers of humanity, carrion-eating servile imitators, arch-cowards and collaborators, gang of women-murderers, degenerate rabble, parasitic traditionalists, playboy soldiers, conceited dandies.”

Edward Lear (1856) castigated the monks of Mt Athos as: “Muttering, miserable, mutton-hating, man-avoiding, misogynic, morose, merriment-marring, monotoning, many mule-making, mocking, mournful, minced fish, marmalade-masticating Monx.”

Quite puts Trump’s “Bad!” tweets in the shade.

Parris quotes a fellow don’s description of AE Housman: “Descended from a long line of maiden aunts.” That perfectly suits his public persona. But, when it came to dishing out abuse against fellow classicists, he had no equal. The vituperative gems may be found in the Prefaces to his editions of Roman poets Juvenal, Lucan, and Manilius. A typical example runs: “Stoeber’s mind, though that is no name to call it by, was one which turned as unswervingly to the false, the meaningless, the unmetrical, and the ungrammatical, as the needle to the pole.”

Or:

“Not only had Jacob no sense for grammar, no sense for coherency, no sense for sense, but being himself possessed by a passion for the clumsy and the hispid, he imputed this disgusting taste to all the authors whom he edited.”

Classy, classical carping, several cuts above our homegrown trollers.

For concluding ancient-modern link, step forward Theodore Roosevelt who (1914) wrote off Woodrow Wilson as “a Byzantine logothete, supported by all the flub dubs, mollycoddles, and flapdoodle pacifists.”

How many of our politicians would have the faintest idea what a Byzantine logothete was?

“Dear me – once upon a time, I enjoyed a sense of amusement and superiority toward ‘cranks’. And now, here am I, a ‘crank’ myself. Take care, oh, reader, with whom you are amused, unless you enjoy laughing at yourself.” – Fort, *Books*, p895.



# THE C NSPIRASPHERE

Has the attitude of the mainstream media to conspiracy theories changed from amused condescension to moral panic? **NOEL ROONEY** looks at their response to QAnon.

## QANON AS THREAT

I've written in these pages, on more than one occasion, about the strange creep of conspiracy theory and conspiracist themes into the mainstream. When I first observed this phenomenon, it was largely a form of media entertainment involving 'look-at-the-nutters' articles on Flat Earth theory, the Moon Landing Hoax, and generally the more exotic reaches of the Conspirasphere. In some newspapers (a couple of UK tabloids come to mind), there was even a hint of breathless sympathy for views that would not normally make it as far as the pages of the press.

Recently, however, the flippant attitude of the media has given way to something more akin to moral panic. Conspiracy theory has morphed from treat to threat, and the main focus of this new wave of hand-wringing journalism has been QAnon (**FT371:32-39**). How and why has a fringe movement in the USA (where 75 per cent of the population has never heard of QAnon, let alone been threatened by it) become the signal danger to democracy as far afield as the UK and Australia? What we are witnessing here, I believe, is a kind of paper tiger mania that has infected some sections of the media to the point where they have become the ironic marketing outlet for all things QAnon. Conspiracy theory aside, this is in itself a properly forteen phenomenon.

Moral panic is, of course, not new. From Reds under the bed to non-existent Satanic child abuse, the media have regularly been prone to promoting the fear of completely spurious perils. The QAnon scare is in some respects just another in a long line of hollow monsters haunting the less rational segments of the media; or a shibboleth for a sense of fear



## *The attitude of the media is something akin to a moral panic*

that needs to erupt publicly every so often in a popped bubble of catharsis. That eruption requires an object; as Paul Valéry, put it: "We hope vaguely; we fear precisely."

Let's look at some basic misconceptions around QAnon. First and foremost, QAnon is not a conspiracy theory. It is a loosely knit, and often fissiparous, community of interests that has coalesced around the cryptic posts of an anonymous source on an obscure and often scurrilous social media platform. Q offers a single – and singular – original conspiracy theory: that an alliance of military and intelligence operatives has formed behind the figurehead of Donald Trump to fight an internecine war against the Deep State. The necessity for this conflict is not properly articulated in Q's gnomic and fragmentary writings; in fact, the bulk of what is perceived as the Q canon is the work of a small, dedicated group of individuals interpreting the Q Drops for the wider QAnon community. These Q-proofers

and Q interpreters have drawn on an eclectic range of pre-existing conspiracy theories to shore up the skeletal and deliberately imprecise utterances that form the actual output of Q.

The QAnon community, both the core adherents and the rather larger numbers of loose affiliates who include the Q Drops in their piecemeal worldview, take the second-hand material and assimilate it into their ideas about a political reality that appears both threatening and immoral. In many respects, they do precisely what the media are currently doing; they grab bits of Q material and use them as targets to wave their frightened sticks at. The world, for religious conservatives of a certain age, is a strange and foreign place; their personal and collective certainties are under constant threat from the forces of change. Membership of the Qanon movement gives them a modicum of reassurance that they are not entirely alone in a sea of liberal immorality. It also enables a quixotic attempt to build a coherent narrative out of incoherent elements.

This is QAnon, inasmuch as we can actually talk about QAnon as a coherent entity; not so much a threat to democracy as a deeply frightened version of it. Q, without having to

produce much in the way of concrete evidence, offers the comforting illusion of an insider fighting the good fight. And for many on the beleaguered right in the US, that is a message they desperately need to hear. The vast majority of people in the QAnon community, just like the majority of conspiracy theorists, sincerely believe they are engaged in a struggle to defend democracy from an ill-defined, murky cabal determined to strip us of our rights and freedoms.

So it is curious in the extreme that so many in the media see them as exactly the opposite. It is as if a mutual illusion has captured both the Q folks and the journalists who write about them. Each side looks at the other and sees, not a political group with whom they disagree, but an ogre intent on devouring everything that is good. And the media interest in QAnon suffers from the paradox of all moral panics: be careful what you wish for. Just as Facebook did more to disseminate the Pizzagate conspiracy theory than any advocate (in the recent documentary, *The Social Dilemma*, an ex-FB executive suggests that Pizzagate was posted as a 'Recommended for you' titbit hundreds of millions of times), concerned media outlets are doing more for the domestic and international profile of QAnon than any crazed conspiracist ever could.

**SOURCES:** [www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-congress-qanon/bipartisan-measure-introduced-in-congress-to-condemn-qanon-conspiracy-theory-idUSKBN25L2MF](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-congress-qanon/bipartisan-measure-introduced-in-congress-to-condemn-qanon-conspiracy-theory-idUSKBN25L2MF). [www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/20/the-qanon-conspiracy](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/20/the-qanon-conspiracy). [www.insider.com/qanon-violence-crime-conspiracy-theory-us-allegation-arrest-killing-gun-2020-8](https://www.insider.com/qanon-violence-crime-conspiracy-theory-us-allegation-arrest-killing-gun-2020-8) [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/sep/16/qanon-republicans-conspiracy-theory-politics-save-the-children](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/sep/16/qanon-republicans-conspiracy-theory-politics-save-the-children).





# SKINWALKER SCIENCE

A new TV series lets a team of scientists loose in Utah's notorious high strangeness hotspot

Skinwalker Ranch, formerly Sherman Ranch, for 200 years a hotspot featuring all manner of paranormal activity – poltergeist phenomena, UFOs, cattle mutilation, crop circles, mysterious fireballs, and invisible objects emitting harmful magnetic fields (see **FT169:44-47, 363:38-41**) – was recently the subject of a scientific investigation, accompanied by a film crew. The first series (eight episodes) of the ensuing documentary, *The Secret of Skinwalker Ranch*, was broadcast by the History Channel earlier this year. The 512-acre (207 ha) ranch, situated in northeast Utah and said to have been cursed by a Navajo shaman, derives its name from Native American shapeshifters (aka skinwalkers), malevolent witches able to assume the body of a coyote or any other animal. Indeed, large animals with piercing red eyes that are apparently impervious to bullets have been seen prowling around the ranch.

Aerospace engineer and astrophysicist Dr Travis Taylor initially recorded unusually high ionising radiation levels at the site, which he was unable to account for; he subsequently led a research team, including scientists from the University of Alabama in Huntsville, investigating the ranch in summer 2019. The team employed lasers, ground-penetrating radar and drone thermography.

Real estate mogul and tech investor Brandon Fugal had purchased the ranch in 2016 with a view to studying its mysteries; 2019, however, was the first time a film crew had been allowed on site. They were faced with various technical difficulties; camera equipment failed for no apparent reason, fully-charged batteries were suddenly drained of all power, and an unmanned observation balloon unaccountably disappeared when it reached one mile (1.6km) high. Several anomalous and inexplicable electromagnetic readings were recorded, such as abnormally



*“The ranch isn’t some place for ghost hunters to get their jollies”*

high levels of radiation. One of the researchers spoke of “phenomena that cannot be explained by human technology.”

The weirdness increased when all five members of the team observed a silver object flying above the ranch, which they managed to capture on film; below, an entire herd of seemingly agitated cows ran across a field from one side to another; afterwards, at least one of the scientists felt nauseous. Other people living in the area have witnessed silver flying objects overhead, including Brandon Fugal, who described seeing a 40-50ft (12-15m) long

LEFT: Dr Travis Taylor, Dr Matt Turner and Skinwalker team members prepare to launch an instrument payload to measure electromagnetic anomalies. BELOW LEFT: Brandon Fugal, the current owner of Skinwalker Ranch.

silver-greyish disc-like craft.

Fugal bought the ranch from its former owner, the aerospace billionaire Robert Bigelow, who had spent 20 years trying to uncover its secrets. To date, Bigelow has not released his findings; this secrecy is perhaps connected to his involvement in a Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) study of Skinwalker Ranch. The DIA’s research programme was known as the Advanced Aerospace Weapons System Applications Program (AAWSAP), and Bigelow was awarded a \$22 million government contract to “study and generate reports on exotic science, UFOs, and other anomalous phenomena”.

Fugal has outfitted the place with upgraded sensors and video cameras, and rebuts the notion that he intends to market Skinwalker as a “paranormal retreat” or tourist destination. “The ranch isn’t some place for ghost hunters to get their jollies. It’s a serious scientific endeavour that requires patience and humility, and I have committed significant resources dedicated to discovering the truth of what is really happening,” he said, adding that he had amassed credible evidence for “anomalous injuries, footage of anomalous aerial phenomena, transient EMF and a whole array of other bizarre things,” including numerous witnesses to UFO sightings on the property, sometimes in the company of other persons who were thus able to corroborate the sightings.

Asked to expound his own theory of what was going on at the ranch, Fugal answered: “I have no idea. Perhaps it’s an intelligence from another reality or dimension. Perhaps it is some unknown natural phenomenon. I’m open to many possibilities.” His research continues. *vice.com*, 10 Mar; *S.Express*, 19 Apr; *uah.edu*, 26 May 2020.



## FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

The Dead Sea Scrolls give up more of their secrets, while doubt is cast on treasure find



ABOVE: The latest DNA research carried out in Israel has revealed that not all of the Dead Sea Scroll fragments came from the desert landscape around the Qumran caves where they were discovered between 1947 and 1956.

### DEAD SEA SCROLLS [FT393:12]



In contrast to the US Museum of the Bible's dismay that 16 Dead Sea Scrolls fragments purchased at great expense are fakes, study of the genuine scrolls continues to yield new secrets. In the 1950s, a collection of fragments from the original Qumran discovery were given by the Jordanian government to Ronald Reed, a leather and parchment expert then at the University of Leeds. There is no doubt as to their authenticity since they are known to have been found during the official Qumran caves excavations in the 1940s and 1950s and were never channelled through the antiquities market.

At the time of the gift, these fragments were thought to be blank, and after analysis of their physical and chemical composition, they were donated to the University of Manchester's John Rylands Library in 1997. They

remained there, untouched and in storage, until earlier this year, when Joan Taylor, professor of Christian Origins and Second Temple Judaism at King's College London began examining them with a view to identifying items suitable for radiocarbon analysis. Surprised to see what appeared to be a faint, small *lamed* (the Hebrew letter 'L') on one of the 'blank' fragments, she then selected all fragments larger than 0.4 inches (1cm); a total of 51 pieces.

Multispectral imaging, a technique whereby objects are photographed digitally using several wavelengths of light on the electromagnetic spectrum (including infrared) was employed. It revealed that four of these supposedly blank fragments contained letters, sewn thread, ruled lines and even a discernible word. One bears four lines of text, with a total of 15 or 16 complete or partially preserved letters in either Hebrew or Aramaic. The word *shabbat* ('Sabbath') is clearly visible,

which, together with some other clues, suggested the text was a version of Ezekiel 46:1-3.

The project's findings, part of the Network for the Study of Dispersed Qumran Cave Artefacts and Archival Sources (DQCAAS), will be published in a forthcoming report. "With new techniques for revealing ancient texts now available, I felt we had to know if these letters could be exposed," said Professor Taylor. "There are only a few on each fragment, but they are like missing pieces of a jigsaw puzzle you find under a sofa." *livescience.com*, 19 May; *kcl.ac.uk*, 29 May 2020.

And in another example of cutting-edge technology used to shed new light on these 2,000-year-old fragments, a team of Israeli, Swedish and American researchers have been using advanced genetic testing in attempts to piece together the 25,000 pieces of ancient parchment that comprise the Dead Sea Scrolls. Researchers have spent decades attempting

to laboriously piece together the ancient scraps of parchment made from animal skins, found at Qumran in the West Bank, 6 miles (10km) from the Jordanian border, in the 1940s and 1950s.

The new findings show that at least some of the material, written between the second century BC and the second century AD, most likely originated from other parts of the region than Qumran. These new discoveries also suggest that the Judeans of the period were less concerned with precise wording of ancient religious texts than were later Jews and Christians.

But the most enticing prospect for Dead Sea Scroll scholars is that it may finally be possible to match up some of these thousands of fragments, which in some cases bear only a few letters, by means of analysing their DNA. "There are many scrolls fragments that we don't know how to connect," said geneticist Oded Rechavi of Tel Aviv University, "and if we connect wrong pieces together it can change dramatically the interpretation of any scroll."

For example, two pieces, long thought to be part of a single manuscript from the book of Jeremiah, have now been shown to be unrelated, as one had been made from sheep hide, while the other was composed of cow hide. "Analysis of the text found on these Jeremiah pieces suggests that they not only belong to different scrolls, they also represent different versions of the prophetic book," said biblical scholar Noam Mizrahi, also of Tel Aviv University.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, which include biblical texts as well as hymns, prayers, and apocalyptic works, had been hidden in jars in caves near Qumran, home to the ascetic Jewish Essene sect. It had been thought the scrolls had been produced by scribes living in the Qumran community, but it is now believed they were a collection of documents



written in Jerusalem and other Judean locations. All but two of the 26 fragments tested were made from sheep hide, with the research even able to distinguish the genetic signature of different flocks of sheep.

Pnina Shor, head of the Israel Antiquities Authority's Dead Sea Scrolls projects unit, said that this ancient DNA work will complement other research currently being undertaken at Israeli and German universities, creating computer algorithms to establish each fragment's proper place. "This will allow us to use different approaches to the puzzle," she said. "And this study is just the start." *nationalgeographic.com*, 2 June 2020.

## BOOK OF DEATH [FT395:10]



On 7 June 2020, eccentric millionaire Forrest Fenn announced that someone had found the treasure chest containing gold coins, gold nuggets, a vial of gold dust, two gold discs, antiques, jewelry and other valuable items, with a value estimated at between \$2 million (£1.6 million) and \$5 million (£4 million) that he had buried in the Rocky Mountains in 2010, with clues to its whereabouts concealed in a poem that appeared in his self-published memoir. Five people have died trying to locate the treasure.

There is some doubt at Fenn's claim that his code had been cracked and the booty located. He has refused to reveal the identity of the prize winner, on the basis that the man "from back East" wanted to avoid publicity. Tony Dokoupil, news anchor for *CBS This Morning*, who claims to have helped Fenn publicise the treasure hunt back in 2012, says he doesn't believe this is the real treasure. Although Fenn offered photos of the treasure as proof that it had been discovered, Dokoupil is not convinced, arguing that the photos don't constitute proof because they are undated, and

are accompanied by no other details. He believes photos of Fenn posing with the treasure are old ones, taken prior to the alleged burial of the chest.

"There's no proof that it's been found," Dokoupil pointed out. "He's offered none. And he's 89 now. It's possible that what he's actually doing is creating an opening for himself to complete the rather dark and bizarre plan he explained to me nearly a decade ago."

That plan, according to Dokoupil, a *Newsweek* reporter when he first met Forrest Fenn in August 2012, was that Fenn intended to have his own bones buried with the treasure.

"When people find the treasure, they'll find my bones," Fenn allegedly told Dokoupil. "But my bio will be inside, so at least they'll know who I was." At the time, Fenn had been diagnosed with kidney cancer and believed he had only a short time to live. While not revealing how Fenn intended to carry out his plan, Dokoupil believed the chest would contain at least some of Fenn's own bones.

Fenn was an amateur archaeologist himself, and in the late 1990s had been accused of disturbing Native American graves and removing bones. He escaped prosecution by pointing out that the state had illegally trespassed on his property to obtain evidence and that he had reburied the bones, only not in their original graves.

"I think the treasure is in a location where an older man can still get to it and crawl or insert himself in and alongside the chest," Dokoupil said. "I mean, that's how it was explained to me. You have a guy who's been collecting archaeology his whole life, is so in love with it he's hatched a plan to make himself part of that record for all time and invite the public in to try to find it and his bones. I am confident it is not a hoax. Forrest wants to be remembered for thousands of years, and this is his way of doing so." *mysteriousuniverse.org*, 20 June, 2020.

# MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

## 254: BRIDDISH TEETH



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

### The myth

The British have awful teeth. That's when they have any teeth at all. The people of the USA have wonderful teeth, all of them, huge and white and even.

### The "truth"

The strangest insult I ever had flung in my direction came years ago, following an on-line political disagreement. Evidently losing patience with rhetoric, my adversary typed: "Why don't you just buy a frigging toothbrush, English!!!" It was the first time I'd seen triple exclamation marks outside a comic, but more significantly it was the first time I'd encountered one of the USian tribe's central beliefs: that British teeth are lousy, because their owners disdain to maintain them. Evidentially, rather than culturally, this belief is easily demolished. The largest bit of research to date appears to be that carried out jointly by Harvard and the University of London in 2015, which found that a US citizen has on average 7.31 missing teeth, compared to a UK average of 6.97. Most shockingly, whereas in the UK, as you would expect, older generations have the worst teeth, in the US the group most likely to be entirely toothless is adults of working age. Other studies come to similar conclusions; for instance, the British are much more likely than the Americans to visit a dentist at least once a year. It's assumed that this disparity is explained by the relatively greater access to dental care for poorer people in the UK than in the US, while well-off Americans are more concerned than their British counterparts with cosmetic dentistry.

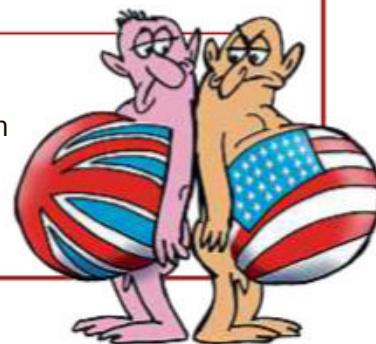
### Disclaimer

If you have the data to reinstate this myth then please send it to the letters page so we can all enjoy drilling down into it.

**Sources** <https://bda.org/news-centre/blog/british-teeth-vs-the-hollywood-smile>; [www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=192566](http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=192566)

### Mythchaser

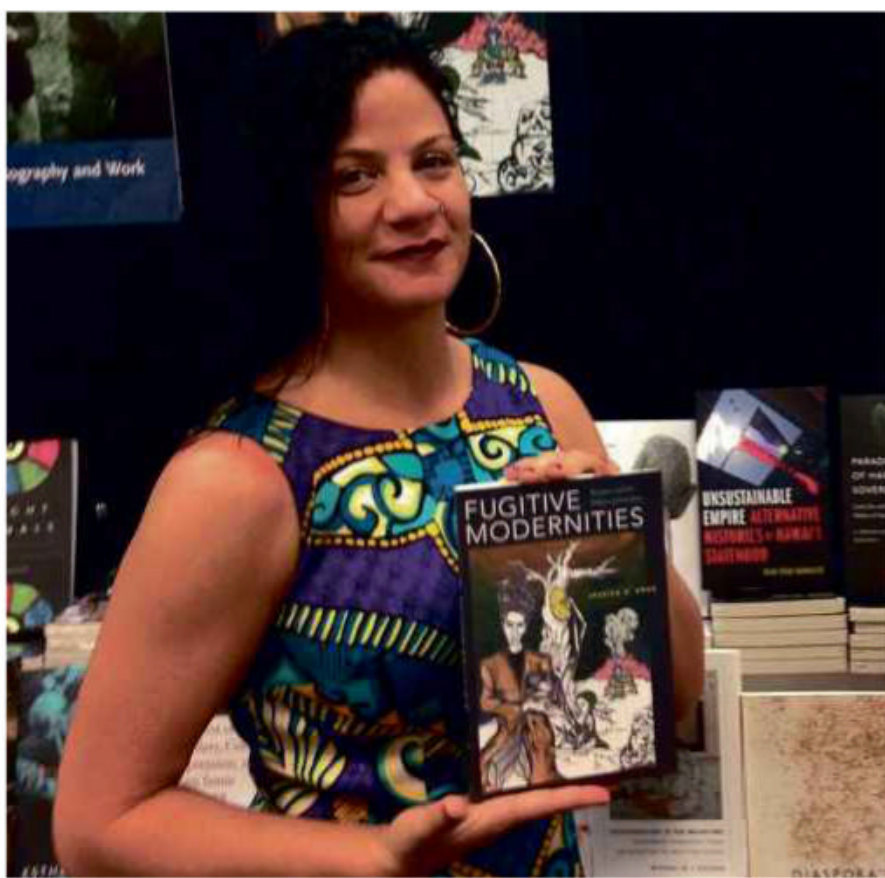
Which other transatlantic Well Known Facts can we puncture? Are USians really more obese than UKers? Do they all visit shrinks? Are the British heavier drinkers? Etcetera?





## CHANGING PLACES

The white academics who falsely adopt Black identities, plus French serial killer author revealed as serial liar



ABOVE: Wannabee “child of the hood” Jessica Krugman, actually born to Jewish parents in suburban Kansas. RIGHT: Fellow fake Black person, Rachel Dolezal.

### FUGITIVE IDENTITIES

Jessica A Krug, an activist and associate professor at Washington DC’s George Washington University, has admitted to having adopted a pretended Black Latina identity for several years, despite actually having a white background. Dr Krug is attached to GWU’s Department of History, where she taught world history, African history, the Black Atlantic and the African Diaspora. Her departmental profile describes her areas of expertise as Africa, Latin America, African American history, the Early Modern world, and imperialism and colonialism.

She received financial assistance from cultural institutions such as the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture to support her writing of her first book, *Fugitive Modernities* (2018), about resistance during the transatlantic slave trade, specifically focused on Angola, Brazil and Colombia. Dr Krug dedicated the book to “my ancestors, unknown,

*“I am not a culture vulture. I am a culture leech,” she wrote*

unnamed... Those whose names I cannot say for their own safety, whether in my barrio, in Angola, or in Brazil.” She calls her book “a love letter for all of those who have been murdered fighting for freedom... a love letter for my siblings in solitary, from Rikers to San Quentin, for my cousins being held on gang charges, for my femmes turning tricks.”

On the biography page of her now-deleted Twitter account Krug described herself as “an unrepentant and unreformed child of the hood,” stating that “much of her time, energy, and all of her heart are consumed in the struggle for her community in El Barrio [East or Spanish Harlem, one of NYC’s largest Hispanic, predominantly Puerto

Rican, communities] and worldwide, whether against the violence of the state as manifest by the police, the encroaching colonialism of gentrification, or around issues of community health and environmental justice.”

In activist circles she was known as Jessa La Bombalera [Jess the Bomber]. At a recent New York City public hearing into police brutality, she introduced herself by saying: “I’m here in El Barrio, East Harlem – you probably have heard about it because you sold my fucking neighbourhood to developers and gentrifiers,” afterwards criticising “all these white New Yorkers who... did not yield their time for Black and Brown indigenous New Yorkers.”

But in a self-abasing *mea culpa*, posted on 3 September 2020 to the online forum Medium, she confessed that her entire career had “been rooted in the napalm toxic soil of lies,” explaining that “to an escalating degree over my adult life, I have eschewed my lived experience as a white Jewish child in suburban Kansas City under various assumed identities within a Blackness that I had no right to claim: first North African Blackness, then US rooted Blackness, then Caribbean rooted Bronx Blackness”.

Although referring to teenage trauma and “abuse within and alienation from my birth family” she does not offer these as excuses for her subsequent deception: “I am not a culture vulture. I am a culture leech”. And while acknowledging “mental health demons” which she has been battling her entire life, and which “likely explain why I assumed a false identity initially, as a youth, and why I continued and developed it for so long”, these mental health issues, she says, can neither ex-

plain nor justify her behaviour. In particular, she highlights having regularly critiqued “any and every non-Black person who appropriates from Black people” despite this being precisely what she herself had done, and which her career and identity had been based upon. It is thought that she posted her online confession

in the knowledge that a public exposure of her false identity was imminent, several academic colleagues having recently begun to confront her, following their own investigations into her background. Those who knew Krug as the activist ‘La Bombalera’ expressed their shock at the news: “I’m dazed and still processing my emotions, but mostly, I feel betrayed, foolish and, in many ways, gaslit,” wrote author Robert Jones Jr on Twitter.

The case is reminiscent of the scandal surrounding Rachel Dolezal, a civil rights activist and former chapter president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) who was outed in 2015 for having falsely adopted a Black identity by her own parents. They were poor, uneducated white Christian Pentecostals who put her to work on their Montana farm. At times they beat her, believing her to be possessed. They adopted four Black babies when she was 15, and with her mother incapable of caring for them due to chronic fatigue, Rachel took on the role of big sister and mother, braiding their hair, teaching them Black history, and increasingly coming to identify with Black rather than white people. She began to alter her appearance, darkening her skin and having her hair permed or braided. In interviews, she stated that while biologically born white, to white parents, she identified







as Black, and that she sees race as a social construct. She later allegedly referred to herself as “the world’s first trans-black case”.

Comparisons have also been made with US senator Elizabeth Warren, who had claimed Native American ancestry and falsely identified herself as Cherokee. Challenged by President Donald Trump to take a DNA test (he has repeatedly mocked her as ‘Pocahontas’), Warren’s test result indicated mostly European ancestry, but with the possibility of the existence of an unadmixed Native American ancestor six to 10 generations ago.

Other, more historical instances of persons claiming an ancestry other than their own include Iron Eyes Cody (1904-1999), a film actor who played Native American roles, notably Chief Iron Eyes in Bob Hope’s 1948 comedy *The Paleface*, but who also appeared alongside John Wayne, Joseph Cotton and Steve McQueen and others, in over 100 movies. Actually born Espera Oscar de Corti of a Sicilian father and southern Italian mother, he claimed a Cherokee father and a Cree mother. He wore his on-screen costume of braided wig, fringed leathers and moccasins in daily life, and maintained his Native identity, only revealed incorrect after his death (for more on Cody and other Native American ‘pretendians’, see FT370:46-51).

Three critically acclaimed memoirs of Navajo life were published under the name Nasdijj in the early 2000s. They received several literary awards. It was only later that their author was revealed to be Tim Barrus, previously known as an author of gay fiction. The supposedly non-fiction memoirs of the three Nasdijj books were largely imaginary, but in part inspired by Barrus’s social work career, during which he had taught Apache children at a

Bureau of Indian Affairs school in New Mexico.

A similar literary controversy surrounded the critical acclaim for the best-selling *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood* by Binjamin Wilkomirski (1995),

purportedly the memoir of a Jewish child survivor of the Holocaust who was born in Latvia and was deported to two Nazi death camps. Certain historical inaccuracies in the book raised doubts; it was subsequently claimed that ‘Wilkomirski’ was

in fact Bruno Grosjean, an illegitimate Swiss boy sent to an orphanage. In 1999, the author’s literary agency commissioned an investigation by historian Stefan Maechler, who concluded that the alleged autobiography was a fiction. Interestingly, however, he noted that ‘Wilkomirski’s’ actual childhood experiences as an orphan in Switzerland closely corresponded to episodes

recounted in *Fragments* taking place in Nazi-occupied Poland, and that his fictional autobiography had been constructed gradually over decades. Maechler suggested that this was not simply a conscious fraud, but that on some level the author may have believed that what he had written was a true memoir. As such, the case has much wider ramifications, being, for example, pertinent to those who claim they have been abducted by aliens or abused by Satanists. *Guardian*, *medium.com*, *D.Telegraph*, 3 Sept 2020.

## FRENCH AUTHOR EXPOSED

French author Stéphane Bourgoïn, whose books about serial killers have sold millions of copies, has been exposed as a serial liar. Regarded as an expert on murderers, he has written over 40 books and presented several French television documentaries on

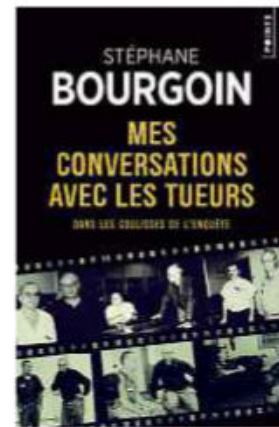
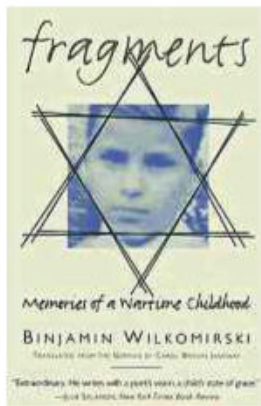
the subject. He claimed to have interviewed more than 70 serial killers, that he had been trained at the FBI’s Quantico base in Virginia, and even that his own wife was murdered in 1976 by a man who confessed to the murder of 12 people after being arrested two years later.

However, in January 2020, anonymous collective the 4ème Oeil Corporation accused Bourgoïn of lying about his past. He subsequently admitted to the French press that the murdered wife had never existed, and that he had never trained with the FBI, interviewed Charles Manson, or been a professional footballer.

“My lies have weighed me down,” he told *Paris Match* in an interview. “I have arrived at the balance-sheet time.” In another interview for *Le Parisien*, he described himself as a mythomaniac. “I completely admit my faults,” he said. “I am ashamed to have lied, to have concealed things.”

He had invented the imaginary wife based on Susan Bickrest, a young woman he had briefly met in a Florida bar. 24-year-old Bickrest was murdered by serial killer Gerald Stano in 1975, who later admitted to killing 41 women and was executed in 1998. “It was bullshit,” said Bourgoïn. “I didn’t want people to know the real identity of someone who was not my partner, but someone who I had met five or six times in Daytona Beach, and who I liked.”

In another interview, Bourgoïn told *Le Figaro* he believed he needed psychological counselling, saying he had exaggerated and lied about his life because he had always felt unloved. “I am profoundly and sincerely sorry,” he added. “I am ashamed of what I did, it’s absolutely ridiculous”. *theguardian.com*, 13 May 2020.



ABOVE: French author Stéphane Bourgoïn invented an imaginary murdered wife.



## FUTURE SHOCKS

A pig with a tiny computer implanted in its brain, 750 million genetically modified mosquitoes and an artificial intelligence Jesus

### COMPUTER-OPERATED PIG

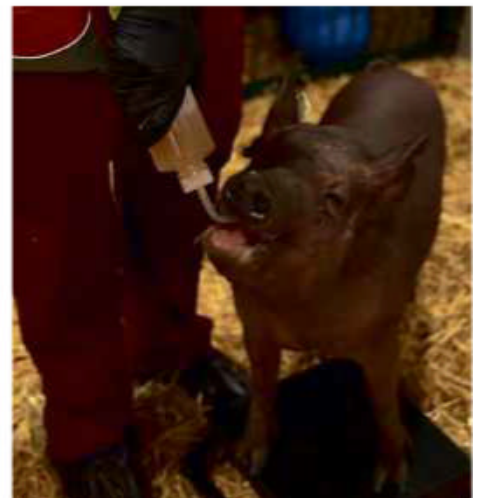
At a livestreamed event aimed at recruiting employees for Neuralink, his neuroscience startup, billionaire tech entrepreneur Elon Musk presented a pig, Gertrude, who has, he said, a small computer implanted in her brain. “We have a healthy and happy pig,” said Musk, “initially shy but obviously high energy and, you know, kind of loving life, and she’s had the implant for two months.” He described the coin-sized implant as “a Fitbit in your skull with tiny wires.”

Musk co-founded Neuralink in 2016, aiming to create a wireless brain-machine interface with the goal of helping cure neurological conditions and allowing people with paralysis to control a computer mouse. Neuralink employs around 100 people, but Musk hopes to expand the workforce to 10,000. The company has raised over \$150m (£110m) in funding, including \$100m (£75m) from Musk himself. In 2019, it showcased a procedure that implanted tiny electrode “threads” into the brain together with another device behind the ear. The latest development, as seen in Gertrude, is much smaller and does not require the ear device. The computer is implanted in the brain by a surgical robot under local anaesthesia, and is removable. Musk displayed another pig, Dorothy, who, he claimed, had had one of the devices implanted and later removed, saying: “What Dorothy illustrates is that you can put in the Neuralink, remove it, and be healthy, happy and indistinguishable from a normal pig.”

Although Musk said the new technology could be used to summon a Tesla (his high-end electric car), play video games, or allow a person with a severed spinal cord to walk again, he did not present any scientific evidence to support these claims. However, small devices that electronically stimulate nerves and brain areas have



ABOVE: Elon Musk’s Neuralink aims to create a wireless brain-machine interface; Gertrude the pig (right) is an early recipient.



been implanted in humans for decades to treat hearing loss and Parkinson’s disease, and neuroscientists have conducted brain implant trials in a small number of people with loss of bodily function control due to spinal cord injury or stroke. The subjects were able to control robotic limbs and computer keyboards or mice. Although most practical applications of wireless brain-machine interfaces are medical, Musk has also suggested that these devices may assist human intelligence to compete with artificial intelligence, which he describes as an “existential threat” *Guardian*, 29 Aug 2020.

### AI JESUS

A software designer has created an artificial intelligence Jesus Christ tasked with producing texts based on the King James Bible and mimicking its style and content. George Davila Durendal’s so-called ‘AIJesus’ has generated 60,000 words of verse, all on one of three themes: The Plague, Cæsar, and The End of Days. It developed its vocabulary by scanning the King James Bible alone. While some verses are nonsensical, others have some semantic content. Thus, one passage reads:

*The Plague shall be the fathers in the world; and the same is my people, that he may be more abundant in the mouth of the LORD of hosts. For the tabernacle of the LORD shall be known by the works of the LORD, which proclaimed against this city;*

*according as he hath sent me to the marriage of the Spirit.*

Another, on the End of Days:

*And he that was dead, the servant of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak unto you all that dwell in the wilderness and they shall be saved by the border of the LORD and his priests and his sons, and on the seven lambs, and of the seven places of the beast, and the other on the sabbath days.*

A third section began:

*The scribes and the children of Israel were gathered together with the Levites and the men of Bethshemesh, which was the son of Josiah king of Judah, and they hanged them through the head of the body of Christ, and hath sent me.*

Mr Durendal said: “Whether or not God created Man or Man created God might be a topic of eternal debate. But what surely cannot be debated is Man’s creation of AI Jesus.” *dailystar.co.uk*, 28 Aug 2020.

### GM MOSQUITOES

Local officials in Florida have approved the release of 750 million genetically modified mosquitoes designed to reduce local populations of the insects that may be carrying diseases like dengue or the Zika virus. Environmentalist groups warned of potential damage to ecosystems and condemned the plan as a “Jurassic Park experiment”. Another concern was the potential creation of hybrid, insecticide-resistant mosquitoes, but the British-

based, US-operated company Oxitec responsible for the programme insisted it was safe, citing a number of government-backed studies, and claiming to have released “over a billion of our mosquitoes over the years,” adding “there is no potential for risk to the environment or humans.”

Oxitec’s GM mosquitoes, named OX5034, are to be released from 2021 over a two-year period in the Florida Keys, where the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito population are known carriers of deadly diseases such as dengue, Zika, chikungunya and yellow fever. Only female mosquitoes bite humans, because they need blood to produce eggs. The modified mosquitoes are male and contain a protein designed to kill off females before they reach mature biting age. Oxitec hope their GM males will breed with wild females and eventually reduce the population and thus the spread of diseases to humans.

The scheme has attracted criticism, including nearly 240,000 signatures on a petition calling for an end to Oxitec’s plan to use US states “as a testing ground for these mutant bugs”. The company also intends to deploy OX5034 mosquitoes in Texas.

*Aedes aegypti* is an invasive addition to Florida, commonly found in urban areas and living in standing pools of water. In many areas, including the Florida Keys, they have developed a resistance to pesticides. *BBC News*, 20 Aug 2020.





## KARL SHUKER considers a potential new Sumatran man-beast and snake surprises in NZ

### THE 'OTHER' ORANG PENDEK

Once upon a time in the wonderful world of cryptozoology, only a single type of diminutive Indonesian mystery man-beast was widely reported – the *orang pendek* ('short man') or *sedapa* of Sumatra, in this southeast Asian country's Greater Sundas island group, reported by locals and Westerners alike for well over a century. Physically represented by unidentifiable hair samples and wholly distinct footprint casts, this reddish-furred, bipedal, tailless entity is usually said to stand a mere 3-4.5ft (91-137cm) tall. Suggested identities on offer have ranged from a terrestrial form of orangutan or gibbon to a bona fide human species, possibly even a relict representative of our own species' predecessor, *Homo erectus*. So far, so simple (relatively speaking).

Then in 2003, the first skeletal remains of what, after much contention, is accepted by most researchers as a bona fide diminutive human species (rather than merely stunted, freak *Homo sapiens*) were found on the small island of Flores in Indonesia's Lesser Sundas group. Formally dubbed *Homo floresiensis* but known colloquially as Flores Man or the hobbit, it is believed to have only stood around 3.5ft (107cm) tall, and to have become extinct at least 50,000 years ago – or did it? Researchers began hearing native folklore and stories concerning the *ebu gogo*, described not only as a very short human entity but also as still very much alive in the wilder, more remote regions of Flores. If such beings really do exist, might they be living representatives of

*Homo floresiensis*? Some cryptozoological investigators have taken this line of speculation even further, by linking Flores Man with the Sumatran *orang pendek*, even though the latter seems taller

and more ape-like, not to mention zoogeographically separate.

But now comes news of an additional component to the Indonesian man-beast/mini-human mystery that makes matters even more complex and potentially confusing. As publicised recently in a number of online articles and reports, Sumatra may also be home to a second, fundamentally different man-beast from the *orang pendek*, one which, moreover, is very reminiscent of both the *ebu gogo* and Flores Man. Known as the *orang kardil*, according to native testimony this entity is definitely some form of human – not ape – even shorter in stature than the *orang pendek*, hunting with spears and deemed to have killed villagers on occasion. Consequently, is it possible that a truly miniature Indonesian species of human has existed at one time or another not just on Flores, and due to its savage nature has infiltrated Indonesian folklore under various local names such as *ebu gogo* and *orang kardil*, and may even still survive in remote regions of Flores, Sumatra, and perhaps also elsewhere in this multi-island country? All of this is total conjecture, of course, but less than 20 years ago even Flores Man's existence was entirely unknown to science. <https://exemplore.com/cryptids/Orang-Pendek-Sightings-Evidence-of-a-New-Species-of-Hominid> 28 June 2020.

### SNAKES IN NEW ZEALAND

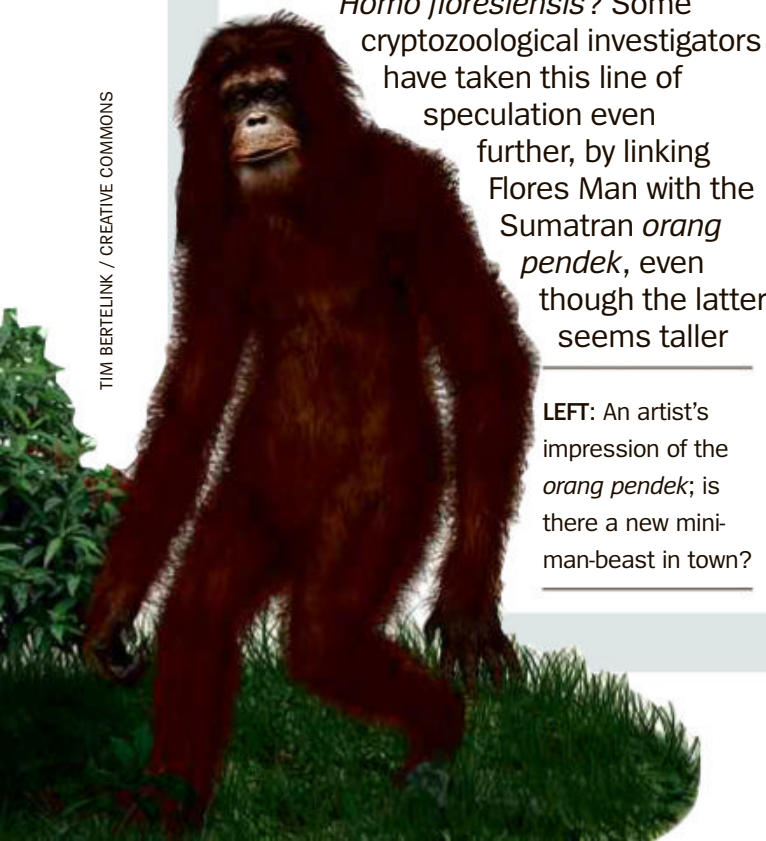
New Zealand is one of the very few snake-free places on Earth – officially. Very recently, however, I was startled to learn that in reality there have been a fair few reports of snakes existing in several widely separate locations on both North Island and South Island. In a recent article for *The Spinoff*, investigator Charlie O'Mannin, who has sought these unofficial ophidians in both the literature and the field, carefully reviewed this fascinating subject. Perhaps the most persistent example concerns claims that thriving, perpetuating populations of Australian copperheads (genus *Austrelaps*) exist in various old West Coast gold mines.

In 2014, after interviewing several veteran gold prospectors who

vehemently claimed that such stories were true, a journalist contacted the Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI), who promptly conducted a thorough search, because the putative presence of snakes was deemed to be a biohazard on account of the risk posed to the indigenous New Zealand fauna by these ostensibly non-native reptiles. No snakes were found, but the matter was considered serious enough to warrant the commissioning of a professional herpetologist to prepare a formal report, which included the exact GPS coordinates where according to one prospector in 1990 a copperhead had actually wound itself round his arm before vanishing when shaken off. O'Mannin obtained a copy of this report and visited the precise location, but no snake showed itself. In his own article, he includes details of much earlier reported snakes, of which the most intriguing is a metre-long snake encountered in 1875 by loggers working within the Ureweras range, one of the most remote regions in the whole of North Island. They swiftly killed it, but how can its existence there be explained?

Although New Zealand has been isolated from all other landmasses for many millions of years, it is home to various native species of lizard and frog, so is it totally beyond the realms of possibility that snakes do exist here too? If so, the chances are that they are nothing more special, zoologically speaking, than escapee/released non-native pets, or even specimens that have stowed away on foreign ships or in imported produce. Also, some snakes are good swimmers, so perhaps by a combination of swimming and rafting on floating vegetation some specimens have made their own way here from Australia.

Least likely, but not impossible, as confirmed by New Zealand's native herpetofauna, is that at least one highly elusive endemic snake species may exist, awaiting formal scientific discovery. This is certainly a very tantalising prospect, and one that I intend to pay close attention to in the future, so watch this space! <https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/03-09-2020/i-went-hunting-for-the-legendary-snakes-of-the-west-coast-bush/> 3 Sept 2020.

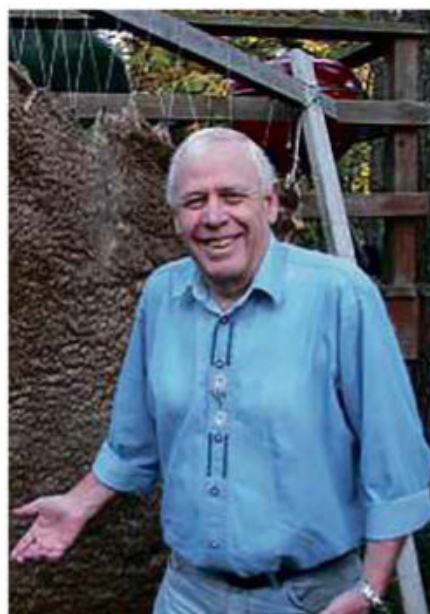


LEFT: An artist's impression of the *orang pendek*; is there a new mini-man-beast in town?



## NECROLOG

This month, a highly irreverent reverend goes to receive his eternal reward (or perhaps to the other place), and we say goodbye to a veteran remote viewer



ABOVE LEFT: Rev David Johnson in flamboyant clerical attire. ABOVE RIGHT: Melvin C Riley tanning a buffalo hide.

### REV DAVID JOHNSON

The Reverend David Johnson, an eccentric and troublesome priest, died in April 2020 aged 66. Described as an attention-seeker and an exhibitionist, his sartorial style resembled a 1920s clergyman. His wardrobe included high starched collars, stockings, buckled shoes, a stalking cape, frock coats and a straw boater; he was frequently observed smoking a pipe in a theatrical manner.

He was born in 1953 in Ponteland in Northumberland to a civil servant father and Scottish mother; he was both embarrassed and proud at being a northerner. He read Divinity at Selwyn College, Cambridge; when Archbishop Donald Coggan visited the college, Johnson hung the organ scholar's underwear on a washing line between the chapel towers as a welcoming gesture. He was elected President of the Cambridge Union in 1976, and here developed his own unique style of public speaking. He was short in stature and spoke in a clipped, high-pitched voice which he ascribed to his mother having taught elocution. One of his mischievous public speaking gambits was to read, in a wholly invented language, an alleged message of greeting and

sermonising from a foreign king or president. At the end of this impenetrable message Johnson would declare: "And Madam President, I think we can all agree that those words are as true today as they ever were!"

After Cambridge he went to Cuddesdon Theological College where he trained for the priesthood. In 1981 he produced *Not The Church Times*, a satirical edition of the *Church Times*, whose front page featured a picture of Heinrich Himmler, captioned: 'London's new Bishop.' Another headline read "Church to covenant with Vanuatu head-hunters."

Together with another clergyman, Rev Toby Forward, Johnson co-wrote *The Spiritual Quest of Francis Wagstaffe* (1994), a clerical version of *The Henry Root Letters*, in which he assumed the persona of the Metropolitan of a fictional offshoot Anglican church, the Old Northern Catholic Church of the East Riding, a patriarchate based in a cul-de-sac in Beverley's suburbs. Wagstaffe's absurd but straight-faced enquiries elicited replies from British public figures and politicians, eminent businessmen and military chiefs, as well as, of course, an assortment of Church dignitaries. Writing to at least

one Prince, he requested tickets for royal garden parties and admission to the royal enclosure at Ascot. He would also solicit advice on sexual matters on behalf of "my nephew, Colin". A letter to the canon of Coventry Cathedral asked if it was true that the worthy's sofa had a dip in the middle due to his sexual exertions prior to seeing the light. 'Wagstaffe' attempted to gain the Bishop of Norwich's backing for a new television programme based on *Baywatch*, called *Beach Mission*. The proposal entailed young evangelists patrolling the beach "in their skimpy costumes, attracting young viewers, then when they had got their interest, they could slam home the Gospel message".

Johnson's own beliefs leaned towards Anglo-Catholicism, although he would often warn of the dangers in giving way to "Roman fever". His political views were right wing. As rector of Cogenhoe, Northamptonshire, he invited a range of guest speakers to preach, including Enoch Powell. He was a popular after-dinner speaker at rugby club events, appearing in full clerical evening dress and with a somewhat risqué act. Many audience members were surprised to learn he was

a genuine priest.

After Johnson's numerous alcohol-fuelled indiscretions, the Church authorities decided to retire him early at the age of 42, with a pension and a terraced house in Cowley, Oxford; miles from the sea, he nevertheless named it 'Seaview Cottage'. In his fifties he became a committee member of the Oxford Union and Chaplain to Stringfellow's nightclub in London. He was unmarried.

*David Johnson, priest, born Ponteland, Newcastle, 5 Dec 1953; died Abingdon-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, 22 April 2020, aged 66.*

### MELVIN C RILEY

Remote viewing pioneer and professional soldier Melvin C 'Mel' Riley died in April 2020, aged 74. Born in Wisconsin in 1946, he experienced visions in which he was living among Native American villagers at some period in the past. During these visions, so vivid that he later described them as 'bilocations', he believed his Native 'brothers and sisters' had imparted their secrets and wisdom to him. An aficionado of Native American art and traditions, he learned the art of Native beadwork and leathercraft, working with deer or buffalo hides he had cured and tanned himself.

At the age of 23 he was drafted into the army, his first assignment being with the 2nd Military Intelligence Battalion Aerial Reconnaissance Squadron (ARS) in Kaiserslautern, Germany. A year later he was moved to the USAF's 497th Reconnaissance Technical Group (RTG) in Wiesbaden, where he worked as an aerial observer on Air Force flights over restricted territory, interpreting satellite and aerial intelligence collected over Warsaw Pact countries.

In 1976, on the recommendation of a senior intelligence officer, he was assigned to Mary-





land's Fort George G Meade, headquarters of the National Security Agency (NSA) and the Central Security Service (CSS), as well as the US Navy's Cryptologic Warfare Group Six. It was here that he began working on the remote viewing programmes later known as the Stargate Project, together with Lt Frederick 'Skip' Atwater, under the oversight of Major General Albert Stubblebine (see obit FT359:28 ; also see FT263:42-44). Stubblebine allegedly sought to create "super soldiers" with the ability to levitate, become invisible and walk through walls.

Riley, under the code name 'Viewer 011' was the first official military remote viewer assigned to the programmes GONDOLA WISH, GRILL FLAME, CENTER LANE, PROJECT CF, SUN STREAK and SCANATE. An important contributor to well-known remote viewing projects, he was involved in efforts to locate the 52 US hostages held in Iran between 1979 and 1981 and attempts to learn details of the Soviets' involvement in Afghanistan. Other 'psychic spy' operations sought to remote-view Soviet R&D facilities and to combat narco-trafficking during the War on Drugs. Riley was not just a viewer, but also acted as a project officer, monitor, and analyst.

He retired in 1990 and settled with his wife Edith, an emergency room nurse, in the town of Scandinavia, Wisconsin. His knowledge of Native American culture, crafts, and history led to his being hired as director of the New London Public Museum, which preserves the region's natural, historical, and Native culture. He also continued private remote viewing work with other ex-military members of the Stargate unit. He died from lung cancer complications with his wife by his side.

*Melvin C Riley, remote viewer, soldier and museum director, born Racine, Wisconsin, 10 Apr 1946; died Scandinavia, Wisconsin, 25 Apr 2020, aged 74.*



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

### THE ANAHEIM EXPERIMENT

It's one of my favourite fortean experiments. In 1977, eight young men and women were brought to Anaheim Memorial Hospital in California, hypnotised and then asked identical questions about their experiences with UFOs. The group running the experiment (under Alvin Lawson) noted how the answers to the questions were similar both among the respondents and also to wider reports of UFO experiences. Common points included: aliens using breathing apparatus; smoke trails seen behind UFOs; and samples of body fluids being taken by our alien overlords. So far, so normal, you might be thinking. But the remarkable thing about the Anaheim experiment was that the eight students *had never seen a UFO*. The eight had, in fact, been recruited as "creative, verbal types" from the local university. Then, once hypnotised, they had been encouraged to describe a non-existent experience and they had done so in terms which would have convinced most UFO enthusiasts that their memories were 'the real thing'.

The Anaheim experiment has been, over the years, used to make various points. It shows how hypnosis can kick up stock answers; John De Herrera wrote a short pamphlet on this. It hints that some far-out experiences are culturally constructed: it would be interesting to see how many of these UFO 'memories'

were based on old episodes of *Star Trek* and *Lost in Space*. Then, the late, great Hilary Evans used the Anaheim experiment as a pointer to group ESP or even some kind of collective unconscious.

My real interest is not in the experiment, which is little more than a footnote in fortean history, but, rather, in the method. Why stop

with aliens? Let's take another form of encounter: the ghost. I'm open to doing the same thing with sasquatches, fairies, super-heroes, demons, angels, Christmas elves or any other form of the 'impossible'. Get your eight or, better, 80 'creative, verbal types' and let them off the leash in the depths of the unconscious. Use hypnosis, by all means. But my suspicion is that two glasses of red wine and a stopwatch would equally do the trick for some, pathfinding visualisation with prompts for others. Ask

'contactees' identical questions about their ghost encounter: then create a list of common elements. It becomes, of course, still more interesting if you can compare answers from different generations and different countries. Would French answers differ from American answers? Would pensioners see something different from the young? Would, for that matter, answers differ by gender or by personality type? Then, most importantly, what conclusions do you draw if, as at Anaheim, a significant number of real-life experiences parallel imagined ones?

THE LATE,  
GREAT HILARY  
EVANS USED  
THE ANAHEIM  
EXPERIMENT AS  
A POINTER TO  
GROUP ESP





## Why would you even come here?

**JENNY RANGLES** says our own technology suggests it's time to reassess the idea of alien contact

Whenever I hear Richard Strauss's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, instantly evoking Stanley Kubrick's ground-breaking film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, my mind travels back to the 1960s. I picture leaving the cinema awestruck after seeing this epic movie based on an Arthur C Clarke story.

I was working hard at school, with the aim of becoming an astronomer. Exploration of space was a decade old. We expected the wonders we saw in the film to be a reality by 2001. And, of course, some were. Multiple BBC TV stations born of futuristic technology made movie audiences laugh back then; BBC 2 was new in those days, but proved prescient. What about Pan Am flying in space? Who would have guessed that by 2001 Pan Am would not exist and everyday spaceflight be no nearer?

Two decades after seeing *2001*, I was in Australia where I met a real astronaut heading for Mars. It has been nearly 30 years since he told me about his coming mission – and yet, in 2020, nobody is doing what he felt then was imminent.

It is interesting to ask why we have not yet accomplished what he was training hard to achieve back then. Given that this man's mission to Mars never happened, perhaps it's also interesting to ask why we still assume that aliens visiting Earth have crossed far greater distances to pick up people from cars to play games with them inside a spaceship.

Pondering the answers set me thinking about the link between these expectations and why I think we might need a reassessment of the whole concept of alien contact.

Consider some of the Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind that I have been involved with – particularly those that involve multiple participants. Most 'alien contacts' are single-witness events that take place late at night. But there are a surprising number where more than one participant is abducted together and these are perhaps more illuminating than we realise.

One of the earliest such cases was investigated in Essex, where I met the family. It happened in 1974 and involved a young married couple and their three young children hurrying home after a family visit. First they saw a strange light in the sky. Then they drove into a green mist – the car radio started sparking and was hastily disconnected – and then they were through the mist and home. Except it was now two and a half hours later than when they had driven into the mist just 'minutes' earlier.



**ABOVE:** A Pan American 'bump' hat with the original company logo, worn by Keir Dullea in *2001*. By the year 2001, Pan Am no longer existed and everyday space flight was no nearer to becoming a reality.

### One of the six-foot tall aliens was female and put on the witness's high-heeled shoes to try walking in them

They had no recall of what had happened until they underwent hypnosis. Then they described "floating" into a UFO and seeing themselves below in the car via some kind of out-of-body experience. When in the UFO they met two types of alien being and were split up – the father being taken to see the "engine room" of the craft, as if the experience was somehow matching his personal interests.

This pattern is not unusual in CE4 cases

ISABEL INFANTES / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



with more than one witness. It is often not a fully shared experience, though witnesses obviously talk about their individual recall to one another, so it can morph towards one. Yet it is not unusual for some witnesses to recall things vividly while others can offer nothing. Often, it is only hypnosis that releases imagery from a vague subconscious dream to become something more 'concrete'.

In Shropshire in July 1981, for example, three women in their mid-twenties driving back from a nightclub at 2.10 am "went very quiet" as if "conditioned" when they saw lights across a field. They were close to home, but as the lights started to keep pace with them all power drained from the car. One of the women reported that they "coasted" past a landed object that then climbed up into the sky. With the engine now working again, the women drove to the nearest police station to report the incident and all spoke of feeling "odd". Police logged this, but did little else beyond establishing that a witness's watch was 15 minutes out of synch – seemingly the duration of the 'missing time'.

A year later, two of the women were hypnotically regressed via our local research group in Manchester. It is interesting how much of their experience was similar to that of the family in Essex. An out-of-body state, a sense of floating upwards, losing trains of thought and what I call the 'Oz Factor' all suggested they were in an altered state of consciousness. Indeed, both the witnesses shared the sensation of all sound disappearing around them and an inward focusing as the ambient noises faded.

However, after that their recall differed. One was medically probed by small hairless entities that beamed images into her mind and prodded her bones painfully. The other was merely observed by some kind of "robot" before being "floated" back inside the car.

The two women seemed to be kept apart from others when inside the UFO. The third woman, when regressed by a different doctor, again described being on her own and taken into another location with two different entities – these were six feet tall with white skin and long hair and dressed in long green cloaks. One was female and put on the witness's high-heeled shoes to try walking in them.

There is much more to these cases, of course, and dozens more like them around the world – but one thing is obvious. These people share a genuine, partly physical experience, but then have a confusion of memory and lose sense of time and, via the Oz Factor, enter an altered state. But their subsequent memory of the 'abduction' is personal and often focused on the self and bypassing others who were present.

It is as if two separate things are taking place: a physically real, energy-triggered event shared by all involved and a very subjective sequel, personal and dreamlike, often only teased out via hypnosis.

So why do we presume these two elements are actually one experience and



**TOP:** An Atlas V rocket carrying the Perseverance rover to Mars lifts off from Cape Canaveral on 30 July.

ascribe physical reality to all parts of it? And, if that's not what's going on, what might otherwise be happening in cases like these?

To consider that, think about what happened in real life space exploration since I met that astronaut in Oz (the country, that is).

Sending humans to the Moon was expensive and we stopped doing it soon after *2001: A Space Odyssey* was released. Getting to Mars is far more difficult, as it is many times farther away from Earth. The journey to Mars is months long and hazardous. It makes sense to use an unmanned spaceship that constitutes only a financial loss if struck by asteroid debris en route, one that has no need of water and air, which, if compromised, partway there would leave astronauts without hope of rescue.

More significant even than these considerations is that technology has advanced in ways we could not easily foresee back in the late Sixties and has become in some senses superior to using humans.

We can send craft to Mars (indeed, three are heading for an early 2021 rendezvous now; see this issue's Science column, p.16). They have very ambitious plans when they get there. However, throughout the Sixties only three of the first 13 attempts got that far; and they didn't even land – by far the hardest part, as Mars has an atmosphere and weather, unlike the Moon.

Even with 21st century technology, a quarter of the missions sent there have failed. Needless to say, this would present an unacceptable risk if humans were aboard – especially as their needs would almost certainly produce a higher failure rate.

So instead of putting effort into risking lives, we changed tack and designed technology to do everything humans could do, but without the risks – even designing a helicopter to fly on Mars, controlled from millions of miles away. Rovers have been driving over the surface for years, taking spectacular pictures and digging into the ground to analyse data for evidence of life – still quite possible, as this arid world once had oceans.

Which brings me to the point. Our

assumption in the Sixties that aliens would come here to kidnap passers-by to learn about us was based entirely on what we were doing in space at the time, not on the reality of credible exploration.

Of course, highly advanced means of travelling across space, as in *Star Trek*, might exist in the future. Or the distances may forever be insurmountable in a human lifetime. Either way, chances are that an alien intelligence exploring the Universe would be doing what we do now: finding inventive ways of probing Earth remotely.

When I was at college we could only speculate if any star had planets around it. Now we know for sure these are common and can detect atmospheres and broad physical parameters of thousands already discovered. Soon we will take images of them and actually see these other worlds.

It is all but certain that aliens aware of us would do this, and much more, first. So why even come here? Is it not more likely they would 'investigate' remotely rather than by traversing billions of miles of hostile space?

If, indeed, any CE4 cases are caused by alien contact and not some other phenomenon, then might they be an advanced 'remote viewing' technology 'visiting' Earth, but controlled from some distant world; in which case, there would be no need to traverse space to play games with late-night clubbers.

Why stalk vehicles on open roads and risk exposure? From afar, the aliens could use methods we can only imagine to probe for data, with UFO-like energy beams directed remotely. After all, we now study wildlife using satellite technology from space without herds of Zebra having any clue that an eye in the sky is filming their lives.

Alien contact is a rather emotive topic but it is not just an either-or case of ET flying a spaceship here or "it must all be nonsense". There is a third option: alien life forms using highly advanced probing technology to investigate life on Earth without them needing to leave their distant abode. Perhaps the results of their investigations are what we mistakenly interpret as 'UFOs'.



# THE PERIL OF MOVING STATUES

**ALAN MURDIE** wonders if recent outbreaks of iconoclasm across the US and UK reveal our deep-seated fears about whether statues enjoy some uncanny life of their own...

Over spring and summer 2020, the public display of statues of selected historic figures suddenly excited people on both sides of the Atlantic.

In the United States, intemperate mobs of protestors struck at a diverse range of statues deemed offensive. Events saw attacks on memorials to Civil War generals and the toppling of George Washington's bust from its plinth at Washington University. In Boston a crowd beheaded a statue of Christopher Columbus, and on the night of 9 June in Richmond, Virginia, another memorial to Columbus was overturned, set on fire and cast into a lake.<sup>1</sup>

Four days later in the UK, a copycat incident erupted during an anti-racism protest in Bristol, when protestors toppled an 1895 statue of Edward Colston (1636-1721) and threw it into the harbour. This seemed to mark open season upon other memorials of historical personages in cities around the country. In Oxford, students demonstrated and called for an image of Cecil Rhodes at Oriel College 'to fall', and other monuments to historical personages as diverse as Lord Nelson in Norwich, Sir Winston Churchill in Whitehall, Sir France Drake in Plymouth and Boy Scout movement founder Baden Powell, resplendent in his uniform and shorts, on Poole quayside in Dorset, were either deliberately damaged or highlighted as being at risk of protests and vandalism.<sup>2</sup>

Altogether, there has probably not been such an outburst of iconoclastic sentiment in the UK since the enactment of the injunctions of Edward VI in 1547 demanded statues in churches should be "forthwith taken down", accompanied by ritualistic homilies and sermons, and when zealous Puritans destroyed or mutilated thousands of images of saints, angels and the Virgin Mary the following century.<sup>3</sup>

## SCAPEGOATS AND SACRIFICES

Today's vehement public rages against selected statuary would have intrigued earlier generations of anthropologists, sociologists and folklorists, especially those



Some statues, like naughty children, were reversed and made to face the wall

trained in the *Golden Bough* philosophy of Sir James Frazer. Within them they would have detected echoes of the age-old rituals of scapegoating and the sacrificing of humans in effigy form (a substitute for actual human sacrifice) for the benefit of the community.

That such events should occur in 2020 during the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and rising unemployment is unsurprising. Tensions over quarantine restrictions on ordinary life have welled up, with many shut inside for weeks feeling like hitting the roof or worse – domestic violence rates have surged over the same period. On stepping outside, the wish to lash out from frustration remains. On a merely personal level this may occur, as when a wound-up or paranoid individual takes against a statue or painting – perhaps perceiving it as staring at him – its

LEFT: Bristol's Edward Colston gets dunked.

RIGHT: In 1953, Gog and Magog returned to London's Guildhall, replacing the original stone figures (destroyed by German bombs in 1940), which were said to be able to move from their usual positions in search of lunch.

motionless and unchanging visage contrasting painfully with his inner mental turmoil. Psychoanalyst Erich Fromm stated in *The Fear of Freedom* (1942): "The state of anxiety, the feeling of powerlessness and insignificance, and especially the doubt concerning one's future after death, represent a state of mind which is practically unbearable for anybody."

But, as history shows, these feelings go beyond the individual and can engulf whole groups and communities. In such moods, a prominent sculpture or image becomes a convenient symbol upon which anxieties and grievances, actual or imagined, are projected. The unleashing of aggression and the resulting destruction provide a cathartic release for crowds, experienced as a heady rush of relief.

Just such a desperate collective reaction afflicted the minds of many Sicilians in April 1893, after six dry months without a drop of rain. As gardens and crops withered, they prayed fervently, telling their beads and processing, standing or lying down before statues of patron saints in appeals for spiritual help, holding Masses, vespers, concerts and lighting fireworks. All appeals failed, whereupon crowds turned against their saintly images. Some statues were reversed, like naughty children, and made to face the wall. Others were stripped of their beautiful robes, hauled from churches and plinths and threatened, abused and ducked in horseponds. At Licata the patron saint, St Angelo, was beaten, put in irons and threatened with drowning or hanging. "Rain or the rope!" roared the angry crowd shaking their fists impotently in his face. Eventually the rains came.<sup>4</sup>

Such incidents provide a form of collective exorcism, an expulsion of the latest folk demons afflicting a community. Ritualised and repeated, these actions may become









**ABOVE:** A Muslim pilgrim throws stones at a pillar representing the Devil in Mina, outside Mecca. **BELOW:** The statue of King William III in Hull's Market Place is said to get down from his horse at the stroke of midnight and enter the King William pub in search of a drink.

religious observances, the most dramatic annual expression (this year excepted) occurring on the Haj pilgrimage at Mecca. Along part of the route the faithful Muslims rain stones down upon three demonic pillars. When pilgrims run out of rocks, the pilgrims pelt the pillars with their shoes.

Underpinning such observances is a stratum of beliefs encompassing the view that statues, manikins and effigies contain spiritual essences. It is the ancient animistic concepts of spirits and uncanny forces dwelling within monuments and memorials, capable of being revived and exerting influence.

### MOVING MANIKINS

In their most grandiose form, such legends involve whole statues literally moving by themselves. Known the world over, numerous such tales exist in the UK of statues that reputedly start perambulating come midnight, the peak hour for ghostly experiences.

In Norfolk, the effigies of 16<sup>th</sup> century merchant William Peck and his wife rise from their tombs at Spixworth church and walk the churchyard at the witching hour.<sup>5</sup>

At the stroke of midnight in Hull's Market Place, the statue of King William III, which sits astride a regal horse, is said to dismount and enter the now-closed King William pub looking for a drink (*Hull Daily Mail*, 5 Feb 2020). At midnight on 1 August each year, the statue of Queen Anne on Queen Anne's Gate, London, is said to step down and wander the streets. There are no witnesses recorded, though it lies just two miles from where the



## In Cambridge, the stone lions roam down Trumpington Street at midnight

mad old gentleman in Charles Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838) spoke of "the statue from Charing Cross having been lately seen on the Stock Exchange at midnight, walking arm in arm with the pump from Aldgate in a riding habit". Not shunning daylight, the two 18<sup>th</sup> century stone giants of Gog and Magog at Guildhall were supposed to move and get a lunchtime bite to eat, on the stroke of noon. Unfortunately, the Luftwaffe put an end to them and any perambulations in 1940, the modern statues visible today being replicas. Stone lions are particularly prone to prowling. The red lion carving placed above a pub at Sturminster Newton in Dorset is said to get up at midnight and drink at a pump. In Cambridge, the stone lions outside the Fitzwilliam Museum roam down Trumpington Street at midnight; the same hour is chosen by the civic stone lions in Nottingham city centre. In Leeds, it is said when the lion sculptures hear the Town Hall Clock strike midnight on New Year's Eve they stand up and roar.<sup>6</sup>

Because many of these statues are not very old, some of these accompanying tales cannot be ancient – but they continue a tradition of moving manikins, stones and memorials stretching back into antiquity. In the legends of classical civilisations across the Mediterranean, statues and colossi were attributed to wonder workers with supernatural powers or to giants. Archaeologist LV Grinsell in his *Folklore of Prehistoric Sites of Britain* compiled a lengthy and widespread list of crudely carved megalithic stones



moving by themselves. These variously walk, dance, go to drink, or even swim. A standing stone at Lidstone, Oxfordshire, is even said to go drinking from a river when the church clock chimes 12, notwithstanding Lidstone church having no striking clock.

The tellers of such tales are often conscious of their absurdity and “some sort of disclaimer is customary with stories about self-moving stones”.<sup>7</sup> The preference is for relegating them comfortably to fairy tales and spooky fiction, the classic being E Nesbit’s *Man-sized in Marble*, written in 1887. In this story, a recently wed couple move into a rural cottage near an old church containing two effigies of mediæval knights carved in marble. Shortly before Hallowe’en, the couple’s local housekeeper quits, eventually confessing to the husband she is fearful that the two marble carvings of stone knights will get up and go walking at 11pm on 31 October. The husband scoffs at this, but decides not to tell his sensitive wife. On Hallowe’en night, on a whim, he decides to leave his wife all alone, to go out and smoke a pipe. He walks up to the church, these being the days when churches were open 24 hours. Going inside, he looks for the carved knights and finds to his horror and amazement the two effigies are missing! He rushes back to his cottage and his wife, where he finds....

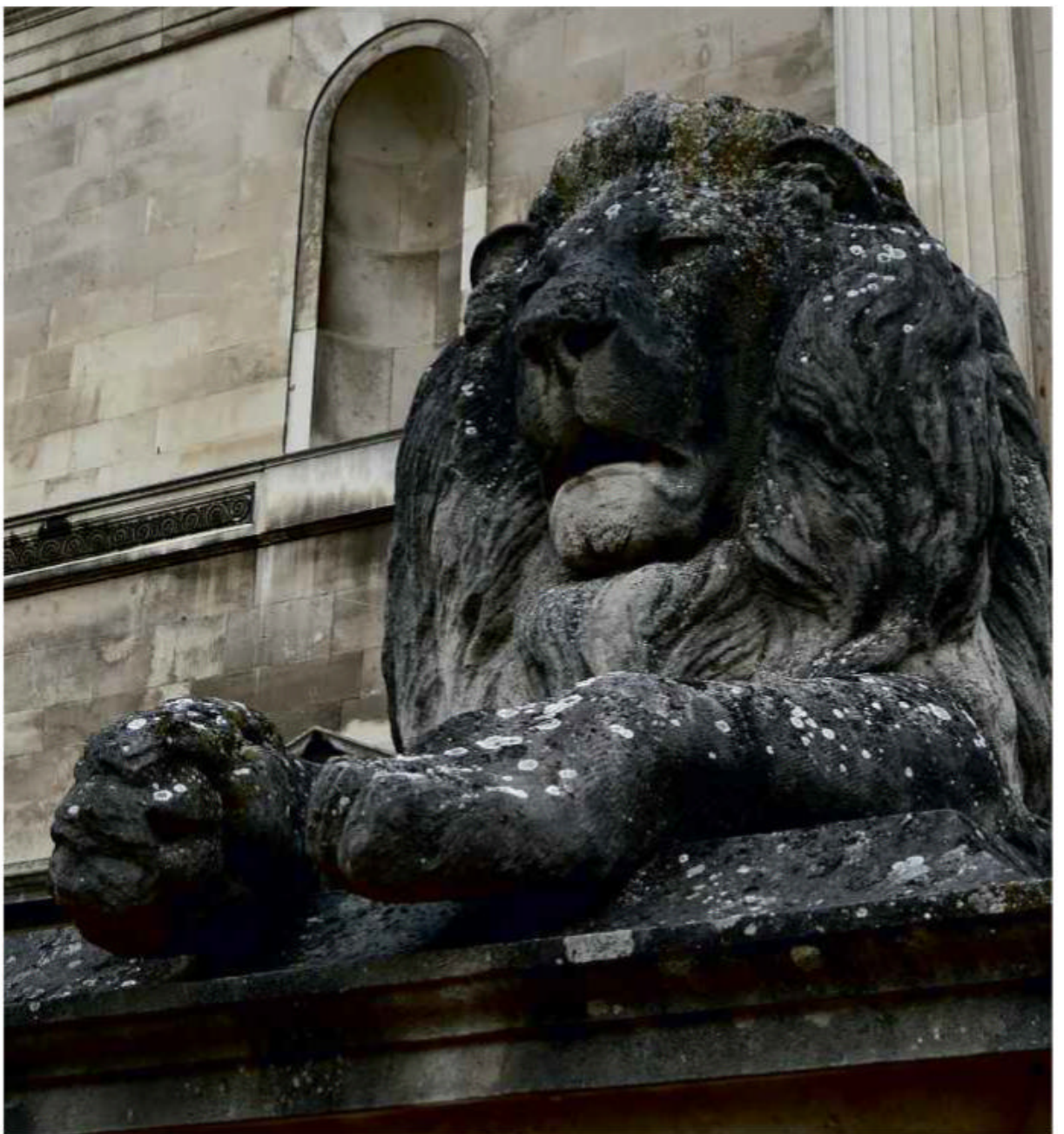
Well you can guess the rest. It is a tale for all those wishing to keep their shudders and frissons of terror at a safe and pleasurable distance, like stories of ghosts that step out of paintings. The fact that this predictable and frankly rather neurotic ghost story and its audibly creaking plot has been anthologised endlessly over the years clearly shows it strikes a chord with successive generations on some subconscious level, raising possibilities that many people do not really wish to contemplate. As CS Lewis in his book *Miracles* (1947) said about stories of magical transformations, “Some people cannot stand this kind of story, others find it fun. But the least suspicion that it was true would turn the fun into nightmare.” If true, they would propel us into a world where Ray Harryhausen-type special effects would be a hazardous reality.

## FLESH AND STONE

Surely, no one could ever take such stories seriously? Yet such reports do periodically arise, and can take on very dark and disturbing twists. As folklorist Jeremy Harte writes: “Jocular or serious, all these stories have some bearing on the age-old history of human relationships with landmarks, and with the secret reality which lies (some say) behind the veil of flesh and stone.”<sup>8</sup> And it should be noted that these stories can take on very dark and disturbing twists. In folklore, a number of moving statues and megaliths are considered dangerous to encounter and may kill anyone witnessing their movement. In Leeds it was also said of the lions if the bell of the Town Hall clock ever struck 13, they would come alive and go on a killing spree around the city. On Midsummer’s Eve night at 12, the statue of ‘Sally-on-the Barn’ at Hanham Abbots,



GRIFFIN ART / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



ETHAN DOYLE WHITE / CREATIVE COMMONS

TOP: William Peck and his wife are said to go walking around Spixworth churchyard at the witching hour.

ABOVE: One of the lions guarding the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge; they too perambulate at midnight.





**TOP:** Visitors flock to the grotto in Ballinaspittle, Ireland, in 1985, when the statue of the Virgin Mary was reported to be moving. **ABOVE:** The sheela na gig at Wiston, Sussex, attacked with a chisel in 2004.

Somerset, is said clamber down and go looking for a victim to slay.<sup>9</sup>

According to Elliot O'Donnell in *Haunted Churches* (1939), if the scythe brandished by a figure of the Grim Reaper carved upon the south side of the church of St Mary the Virgin is seen during the daytime to move by itself, the witness is shortly about to suffer a bereavement. This ominous manifestation may be preceded by a raven flying past.

In San Francisco, in 1942, the police investigated the story of a taxicab driver who claimed to have driven a hitchhiking statue. He had picked up a fare on Mission Street, which he perceived as a lone nun, and taken her to the house of her order. En route, she asked him about the war, and he said it looked bad. She replied, "Well, it will end in September." When they reached the convent, she had no money for her fare, so she went inside to collect some. After the driver waited half an hour in vain for her return, he rang the bell. The Sister in charge of the door told him that the door had not been opened all evening. As the door swung farther open, the driver saw into the lighted interior. Suddenly he pointed, saying, "There she is!" pointing at a life-size statue of the Blessed Virgin standing in the entrance hall. After the Sister explained it was a fixed statue of Mary, he went to the police station "to check on his sanity." The nun's prophecy, of course, proved false.<sup>10</sup>

In 1976, near the very haunted Long Walk near Windsor Castle, a young guardsman was found collapsed. On recovering, he said he had seen a horned statue come to life by itself in the grounds, reviving talk of Herne the Hunter.<sup>11</sup>

In 1982 in Italy, a statue of the Virgin near Carole Compton, a young Scottish nanny who was the centre of a poltergeist outbreak, flipped over. She was later prosecuted and convicted of arson following a series of mysterious fires.<sup>12</sup>

In 1984, a statue of the Virgin Mary was reported moving and weeping in St John's Church, Chicago; a man with a history of mental problems was so deeply disturbed by the claims that he came and shot at it.<sup>13</sup>

Most dramatic of all was a wave of sightings of moving statues of the Virgin Mary at various religious sites across the Republic of Ireland in 1985. In Ballinaspittle, many individuals who gathered in front of a statue of Mary (which was illuminated) reported it appeared swaying back and forth (though only doing so at night). Some interpreted this as a miracle, but a team of psychologists investigating the incident explained everything as an optical illusion: when someone has been staring at an illuminated object against a dark background for a considerable period of time, the object will seem to move. An eyewitness related that when staring at another illuminated object (a telephone pole) against the darkened night sky, this object too seemed to move.<sup>14</sup>

However, a more extensive scrutiny of the large number of press reports logged by *Fortean Times* at the time indicate that reports



# A SELECT HISTORY OF ICONOCLASM SINCE 1500



**ABOVE LEFT:** The wrecking of Antwerp Cathedral, Belgium, 1566. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, Afghanistan, 2006. **BELOW:** The toppling of Enver Hoxha's statue, Albania, 1991.

**1531:** Mexico. Father Zumaraga, the chief inquisitor under the Conquistadors, reports the Franciscan order destroying numerous Aztec temples and that "more than 20,000 figures of the devils they worshipped have been broken to pieces and burned."

**1547:** England. Decree of Edward VI launches a wave of iconoclasm against statues and religious imagery in English parish churches.

**1566:** Belgium. The self-styled 'Beggars of the Wood', a group comprising dissident noblemen, struggling artisans and Calvinist vandals, wreck Antwerp Cathedral and then proceed across Flanders into Holland in an image-smashing frenzy in the name of the Protestant Reformation.

**1643:** England. A Parliamentary ordinance declares that all "monuments of superstition and idolatry should be removed and abolished". Iconoclast William Dowsing destroys images and angels in 250 churches in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk, destroying 80 "superstitious images" of the Blessed Virgin and the saints in Woolpit Church in Suffolk alone.

**1791:** France. Revolutionaries launch attacks on images, statues and symbols of the 'Ancient Regime' and the Church.

**1860:** China. British and French soldiers loot and burn down



the Imperial Summer Palace in Peking. One witness stated that "Officers and men seemed to have been seized with temporary insanity."

**1914-1918:** Belgium and France. Religious imagery is targeted by British artillery officers irritated by stories in the press of the miraculous power of religious statues and images (see Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 1929).

**1917:** Russia. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia embarks upon a series of anti-religious campaigns and persecutions which continue until 1964. Numerous shrines, churches and religious institutions are closed and obliterated.

**1936:** Spain. During the Civil War, Republicans and anarchist groups smash images in Catholic churches and Cathedrals and disinter the bodies of monks and nuns.

**1937-1945:** Germany. The Third Reich purges 16,000 works

of art from museums and art galleries; numerous Jewish synagogues and other cultural treasures looted or destroyed across Germany and in occupied Europe between 1939 and 1945.

**1948:** England. Desecration of a church altar in Yarcombe, Devon, marks the start of sporadic acts of vandalism in churches and graveyards, typically attributed to witches and Devil worshippers. By 1970 it is claimed that there have been at least 300 copycat incidents across England.

**1966-1976:** China. The Cultural Revolution is unleashed by Mao Ze Dong, destroying numerous religious and secular objects and works of art.

**1989-1991:** Former USSR and Eastern Europe. With the end of Communism in the USSR and former Eastern Bloc, crowds target statues of Communist politicians and Marxist philosophers.

**1991:** Albania. Crowds topple statue of former Stalinist dictator Enver Hoxha in Tirana; his regime previously destroyed mosques, minarets and shrines in an attempt to create an atheist state.

**2006:** Afghanistan. The Taliban militants use explosives to destroy giant statues of the Buddha at Bamiyan, central Afghanistan.

**2011-2016:** Syria and Iraq. Islamic State militants target sites and shrines venerated by Shia Islam and systematically destroy pre-Islamic and pre-Christian statues at archaeological sites.

Waves of iconoclasm typically seem to occur whenever perceived authority – whether secular or spiritual, local or national – is questioned or when a new order and ideology is forcibly imposed. Dario Gamboni in *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (1997) distinguished between iconoclasm and vandalism by characterising the second as a senseless, gratuitous act perpetrated by the uneducated, in contrast to iconoclasm, which indicates an intentional, dominating act aimed at change. See also: WH Holmes, 'Examples of Iconoclasm by the Conquerors of Mexico' in *The American Naturalist* (1885) Vol. 19, No. 11, pp. 1031-1037; Alain Besancon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*, 2000.



went beyond merely seeing swaying images of the Virgin including altogether more disturbing visions. On 5 September 1985, a 16-year-old boy at a shrine in Mitchelstown, County Cork, became panic-stricken on seeing the features of the Blessed Virgin turn into a devil, and three girls showed symptoms resembling possession. Other accounts indicated that the atmosphere at the shrine had become cold and unpleasant and that a vision of a devil and a frightening old woman dressed like a nun was seen six weeks earlier.<sup>15</sup>

Fears that Egyptian relics and statues remain spiritually active are longstanding. The most famous example in recent years, though treated as a jocular incident, was the Egyptian figurine at Manchester Museum in 2013 observed rotating on a time-lapse video recording. After Egyptologist Campbell Price stated, “In Ancient Egypt they believed that if the mummy is destroyed then the statuette can act as an alternative vessel for the spirit. Maybe that is what is causing the movement,” his tongue-in-cheek comment ignited worldwide media coverage. The phenomenon was later ascribed to vibration.<sup>16</sup>

Following the death in 1923 of Lord Carnarvon after the opening of Tutankhamen’s tomb, hundreds of worried people sent statues and Egyptian objects to the British Museum, afraid they might hold malevolent powers.

## THE STATUES STRIKE BACK

If such beliefs are deeply embedded in the human psyche, it helps explain why the waves of iconoclasm and censorship become so passionate and intense, an aspect of the global taboo against close contact with the remains and memorials of the dead. An example were the rampages concurrent with the introduction of Christianity into the Nile Delta area, during the third century and fourth centuries AD, particularly after the emperor Theodosius the Great (AD 379-395) ordered the closure of ancient temples. Fanatical Christians hacked away images of gods and goddesses, “the destruction and

vandalism limited only by the incapacity of a decadent people, and by the sheer mass and multitude of the monuments of their ancestors”.<sup>17</sup>

That such beliefs are not extinct in the UK was shown in 2004 by the deliberate chiselling to destruction of an erotic female figure considered an ‘ancient pagan image’,

## Even the removal of statues does not quell fears of the power of the dead

but probably a mediaeval carving representing lust, inside a church at Wiston, Sussex. In 2014, Professor Robin Milner-Gulland stated: “It wasn’t apparently a random act by a passing stranger, but seems to have been somehow connected with parochial dissension between different groups in the congregation: the supposedly ‘unChristian’ carving was perceived as malign.”<sup>18</sup>

Even the outright removal of monuments and statues does not quell fear of the power of the dead; hence so many tales of the occupants of disturbed tombs or memorials wreaking supernatural revenge. The entire removal of an image may even create new ones.

In Dereham in Norfolk, the three-ton statue of agricultural reformer Thomas Coke, Earl of Leicester (1754-1842), was shattered



Photo]

PEG O' NELL'S WELL.

[E. Pye.



LEFT: Thomas Coke atop the Corn Hall in Dereham, Norfolk. TOP: The shapeless figure that may have inspired tales of Peg O’Nell. ABOVE: Another vengeful female statue, Somerset’s Sally-on-the-Barn.





by a lightning bolt on Midsummer's Eve 1950. This did not prevent a dark figure, believed to be Coke, walking the building in 1978 to the terror of two builders. (*Eastern Daily Press*, 2 Feb 2018). Hauntings seem to have arisen after the desecration of Catholic shrines. Following the removal of Marian images at a holy well at Uttoxeter, Staffordshire, the area ever afterwards was haunted by the ghost of a young woman, with locals "so much afraid that few of them could be found hardy enough to go near it after dark." Stories of dreadful Peg O' Nell, formerly a servant from Waddow Hall, haunting the banks of the Ribble River in Lancashire, may have been inspired by a statue, a headless, shapeless figure, taken from nearby Whalley or Salley Abbey, "the representative of some saint of old". ("The Association of the White Lady with Wells" by Coleman O Parsons *Folklore*, vol.44, no.3, Sept 1933). Peg manifests as a vindictive water sprite blamed for drownings along the river.<sup>19</sup>

Worse still, the statues and images may strike back. The casual looting or desecration of graves, monuments and shrines often seems to attract bad luck or punishment. The prehistoric Avebury monument in Wiltshire seems to have been left alone for a long time after a stone toppled upon a mediæval barber-surgeon who had attempted to dislodge it. His corpse was left under the stone; it was retrieved by archaeologists in 1938 and dated to the 14<sup>th</sup> century by coins and a pair of scissors (the oldest ones known in Britain) found with his bones.

During the Commonwealth, stories were rife of Puritan vandals attacking images and suffering what was perceived as divine retribution for their acts of desecration. Even attacking sacred trees proved hazardous, as in the case of the zealous



JIM CHAMPION / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: The Barber Stone, Avebury – said to have crushed a mediæval barber surgeon to death.

axe-wielding Roundhead whose attempt on the Glastonbury Thorn was thwarted when he was so blinded by splinters that it caused him to cut off his own leg.<sup>20</sup>

As I write, the bust of the founder of the British Museum Sir Hans Sloane (being terracotta and thus rather fragile and vulnerable to attack) has been removed from its pedestal and put inside a protective case which will make clear his connections with the slave trade; meanwhile, campaigners are now seeking to have a statue of Sloane removed from Duke of York Square in Chelsea. Ironically, this occurs just as the destruction of property and landmarks in warfare and conflict is beginning to achieve recognition as a punishable crime under international law.<sup>21</sup>

The current controversies over statues and memorials look set to run for some time. Outbreaks of statue smashing may prove cathartic for some, but they serve to divert attention from many other pressing issues and realities, perhaps again pointing to deeper psychological motivations at work. Whatever the shifting causes, justifications and excuses advanced for iconoclasm across the centuries, a fortean perspective certainly suggests that some profound currents and forces buried within the human psyche are being engaged.

♦ ALAN MURDIE is a former chairman of the Ghost Club and the author of numerous books and articles on ghosts and hauntings. He writes FT's regular Ghostwatch column.

## NOTES

1 [www.politico.com/news/2020/06/07/protesters-topple-confederate-statue-in-richmond-305138](http://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/07/protesters-topple-confederate-statue-in-richmond-305138); *Washington Post* 11+12+19 June 2020; *New York Times*, 17 June 2020.

2 *D.Telegraph*, 11 June; *Plymouth Herald*, 9+12 June; *Eastern Daily Press*, 6 July 2020, and many others.

3 See *Documentary Annals of the Reformed Church 1547-1716* (1839) by Edward Cardwell.

4 James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (1924).

5 *The East Anglian Handbook* (1885).

6 *Hull Daily Mail*, 5 Feb 2020;

Enid Porter, *Cambridgeshire Customs and Folklore* (1969); Steve Roud, *London Lore* (2010); Phil Quinn, 'The Folklore of Modern Sites', 3<sup>rd</sup> Stone no 29, pp. 8-11).

7 Edward Waring, *Ghosts and Legends of the Dorset Countryside*, 1984.

8 Jeremy Harte, "When Stones Go Wandering", *Imbolc* 2003; [www.whitedragon.org.uk/articles/stonewalk.htm](http://www.whitedragon.org.uk/articles/stonewalk.htm)

9 Harte, op cit.

10 Richard K Beardsley and Rosalie Hankey, "The Vanishing Hitchhiker" in *California Folklore Quarterly* Vol. 1, No. 4, 1942, pp.303-335).

11 *Sun*, 21 Sept 1976.

12 *Superstition: The Nanny*

*They Called A Witch* (1990) by Gerald Cole and Carole Compton; see also **FT38:32-33, 39:28-30, 42:21, 46-49.**

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# DREAMS, DEATH AND SPIRITUALITY

**ALEJANDRO PARRA** examines anomalous experiences reported by nurses concerning deathbed visions and near-death experiences, and argues that we should pay more attention to the dream life of patients approaching the end.

End-of-life experiences are of interest, both to the general public and to health professionals, because they help establish the importance of preparing for death. These phenomena have been described and categorised in several ways and are well documented, having been observed in different cultures throughout history.

People who are approaching the end of life often experience increasingly vivid and intense dreams. This observation is consistent with the idea that dreams and visions are intrinsic to the transition from life to death. Most research indicates that these experiences occur in close proximity to death, within an interval of hours, days, weeks or even months before it comes. Their content is variable, often involving previously deceased relatives and pets. They can be visual, auditory, and/or kinæsthetic experiences, with visions occurring during waking hours or in dreams. They may also contain references to travel, a sign of closeness to death.

Published studies of these experiences are based mainly on surveys or interviews with doctors or families of deceased persons. An inductive analysis in order to examine their content and subjective meaning has identified at least six categories: positive presences, preparations for farewell, seeing or communicating with the deceased, contacting waiting loved ones, stressful experiences, and resolving issues.

Nurses often hear about dreams based on these experiences. One nurse spoke of a resident in a nursing home whose dreams were an indicator of imminent death. “He said that he saw the animals he had had throughout his life... He felt that they were waiting for him.” The resident died that same week. Another nurse spoke of a patient’s son who woke her in the middle of the night to tell her he had dreamt that his mother was dying. He arrived at the nursing home at 4am and sat next to his mother until she died at 7



## IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT DREAMS AND VISIONS CAN BE SPIRITUALLY TRANSFORMATIVE

o’clock that morning. Without that dream, he would not have been present at the time of his mother’s death.

One nurse described a strange dream she had had of a resident whom she loved very much whose husband had died a year earlier; her health had deteriorated, and she was no longer able to walk. The nurse had gone home after attending her as part of the dying

**LEFT:** Nurses report a variety of anomalous experiences in hospital settings, ranging from NDEs to the sudden inexplicable recovery of patients.

**RIGHT:** The mediæval *Ars Morendi* – or Art of Dying – included many representations of deathbed visions.

process. While in the bathroom, she had an image of the resident standing with her dead husband holding her arm, with a wonderful smile on her face: “She told me: ‘I can walk!’ It was weird, but very comforting.”

Dreams and visions of the end of life are sometimes described as phenomena associated with a strong spiritual connotation; however, even though these events are generally interpreted as religious experiences or encounters, they are emotionally significant even in the absence of such connotations. It seems clear that dreams and visions can be spiritually transformative, as patients describe deceased loved ones as messengers guiding them on their journey to death. Dreams and visions are a rich source of symbolic meaning; indeed, often they can be a message of hope and comfort, or can serve to improve family ties. There are studies which suggest that these experiences provide feelings of joy, serenity, happiness, hope, and wisdom to patients and offer greater control over their fate. In addition, they can help them put their pending affairs in order, and reconcile with their families before dying in peace.

### TALKING TO NURSES

Despite the anecdotal evidence that dreams and visions are positive experiences, doctors and nurses who are not comfortable with end-of-life care have difficulty accepting them as inherent in the dying process. As a result, in the clinical context, these experiences are frequently explained away as hallucinations with clear organic ætiology (i.e., sedatives, fever, or quasi-delusional or





Surge tua  
e hyurose

Deumatus es

Deumatus es

Et in peccata tua

Peccasti

Quare peccasti





**ABOVE:** Many dreams and visions recounted to nurses by dying patients were of being reunited with loved ones – including pets.

confused states). Studies have shown that this lack of recognition isolates patients even more, making them fear ridicule and, therefore, feel uncomfortable when sharing these experiences with their doctors and nurses. Although there is abundant literature on the importance of deathbed experiences, many studies are based on interviews from secondary sources such as relatives, nurses, doctors, and other medical personnel.

Nurses, in fact, report dozens of unexplained experiences: visions in people about to die, near-death experiences, or patients who recover suddenly and completely from illnesses after a religious intervention. Nurses themselves have often had their own experiences in a hospital context, such as seeing apparitions, intuitively “knowing” the nature of a patient’s illness or when he or she will die, or having unexpected experiences in intensive care units, neonatology areas, or pediatric or neuropsychiatric services.

In my study of nurses, I received 443 questionnaires from nurses in Buenos Aires; they came from 39 hospitals, 20 sanatoria, 21 clinics, and seven homes for the elderly. The sample was divided into two groups based on the answers given by the nurses. Those who responded to at least one of the 13 questions of the survey were termed nurses who had had anomalous or paranormal experiences ( $n = 296$ , 67%), while a “control” group consisted of those nurses who indicated that they had not had any such experience ( $n$

## “I KNEW WE WERE GOING SOMEWHERE, BUT WE DID NOT KNOW WHERE”

$= 147$ , 33%). Of the 443 nurses, 353 (80%) were women and 90 (20%) were men; the age range was from 19 to 69 years (mean  $= 39$  years); the average time spent in the role was 10 years; 60 (13%) operated on the morning shift, 110 (25%) on the late shift, and 121 (27%) on the night shift. The main areas covered were the waiting room (140, 31%), the emergency room (72, 16%), Intensive Therapy (80, 18%), Neonatology (42, 9.5%), and other services (ambulances, medical clinic, oncology, paediatrics, among others, 75%).

Originally, the survey was developed from an in-depth interview format of five free-response questions, which were presented to doctors and nurses within the hospital setting. The survey included 13 items of dichotomous responses (YES/NO), with a space for respondents to expand their answer to provide information about the

type of experience. The questions could also be subdivided into two types: (1) Nurses as *recipients* (auditors) of the experiences of their patients and/or colleagues (e.g., a near-death experience or an out-of-body experience,  $n = 177$ , 40%); and (2) Nurses as *witnesses* of anomalous or paranormal experiences ( $n = 266$ , 60%).

### FIVE TYPES OF DEATHBED DREAMING

The dreams and visions under discussion can be divided into five categories:

- (1) A comforting presence
- (2) Preparing to depart
- (3) Connecting with visitors
- (4) Waiting loved ones
- (5) Unresolved issues

#### *A comforting presence*

Some nurses related dreams and visions of the presence of living or deceased friends and relatives, as well as pets or other animals, particularly in children. These dreams and visions were a comfort to the patient. Many of the stories that emerged through my interviews with nurses in hospitals and nursing homes were particularly moving. For example, a patient often dreamed of her dead sister sitting next to her bed. She also dreamed that she herself was younger, that she had gone for a walk and done “the usual things” with her sister. She described these dreams as extremely comforting, because “I’m not going alone ... [my sister] is with me.”



Another patient told her nurse a dream where she encountered her deceased mother talking to her in a beautiful garden, “telling her that everything will be fine. It was very comforting for the patient, who told [her family] that she wanted to go back to sleep, because her mother would return.” Another patient, who had dreamed of deceased friends and relatives as well as living people, also said that everyone “was telling me that I would be fine, that there was nothing to fear.” Still another dreamed of his mother, who had died when he was a child: “The dream was so vivid that I could feel her perfume and hear her voice that calmed me. saying ‘I love you.’”

### *Preparing to depart*

Some nurses and caregivers described dreams of patients who said they were preparing to go somewhere. An elderly patient in a care home described to his caregiver how he had seen his parents, grandparents, and old friends in his dreams: “I knew we were going somewhere, but we did not know where.” Another patient dreamed that she was driving through the city and had to get somewhere, but also did not know exactly where. A third patient dreamed of taking off on a plane with her living son. She could not describe where they were going, but she felt happy. She said that she and her son “were about” to leave. Although there were feelings of anguish because the dreamers felt “in a hurry, in general, the dying people found this experience to be a positive one, rather than painful because of the proximity of death.”

### *Connecting with visitors*

Those in this category described the presence of other people in their dreams and visions as simply “being there” or “looking at them”, rather than relating to or interacting with them. For example, a hospital patient said that she had dreamed of her two aunts standing and watching her while she was reclining on the sofa, which made her feel happy and at peace. However, there were also cases where patients described themselves as interacting with these people in their dreams. One patient said that her husband and her dead sister had met her for breakfast; she also dreamed that she was playing cards with her dead friends. Another patient dreamed that her father and two brothers, all dead, had embraced her in silence and played with her; she then described how “they were welcoming her to death.” One patient recounted a dream in which he played with and caressed his dead dog. Another patient admitted to an Intensive Care Unit told her nurse that “the Virgin was at her side. The patient also said that the Virgin had come to look for her. Twenty minutes later, the patient died.” The nurse and other patients and relatives reportedly began to smell roses.

### *Waiting loved ones*

Some patients dreamed about friends and relatives who had died previously as “waiting for them”. A woman dreamed of six of her already deceased family members in her

room, holding a vigil; they were “waiting for her, and it was good to see them.” Three days before another woman died, she said she had experienced visions of being at the top of a staircase, with her dead husband “waiting for her” at the bottom of the stairs. Once again, the presence of these dead friends and relatives was mainly comforting. “In the hospital I had many patients who told me that someone was watching them, especially more masculine than feminine figures... And a few days later, the patients died,” reported one nurse from the emergency service.

In another hospital in the city of Córdoba, a patient confessed to her nurse upon returning from the operating room that she had seen herself on the table where they were operating, and that she had experienced a sense of peace. She had met a family member who was waiting for her; they talked, they laughed, and then she felt that she came back suddenly. She then asked to see the family member whom she had met, but later learned that, just at the time they were operating, that relative had died in a car accident. Other patients, who insisted that they were not ready to die, experienced anguish over the impression that the dead were “waiting” to accompany them because they sensed or were certain that their final hour was approaching.

### *Unresolved issues*

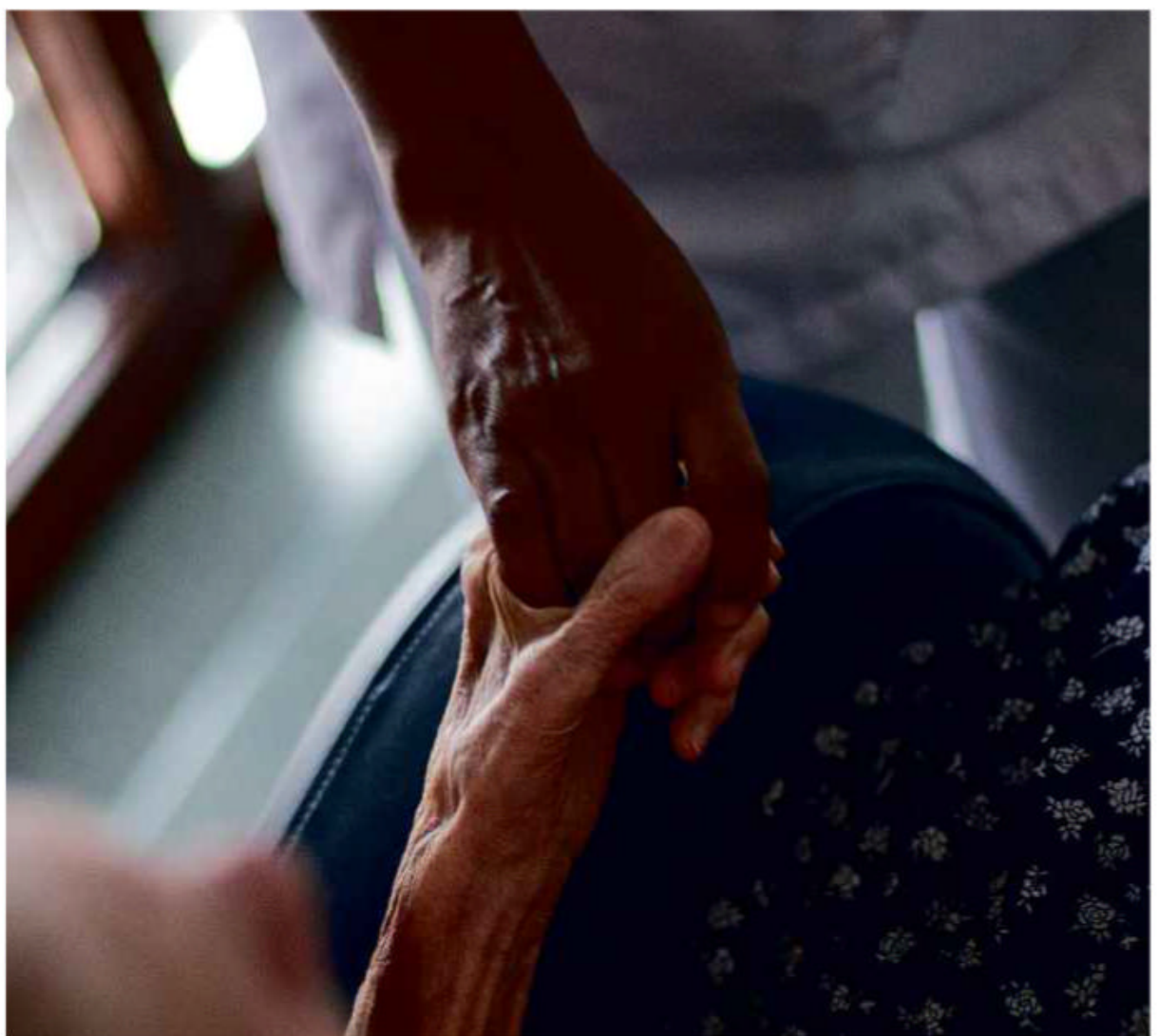
Some patients also had dreams focused on their fears that they could no longer do the things they felt they needed to achieve in their lives. A young mother, for example, had

anguished dreams about her responsibility to her children. These dreams consisted of preparing her children for school and other responsibilities. Another young mother experienced dreams relating to real-life worries about her debts and her children. A 58-year-old woman dreamt of relatives still living and concerns about whether her daughter would have a cell phone.

### *Meanings and messages*

The visions and dreams of these patients are clear and vivid stories that describe significant life events in proximity to the time of death. They definitely appear to be different from hallucinations associated with delirium, in terms of the feelings they evoke (e.g., relief, comfort, anguish), as well as the clarity, detail, and organisation with which they are narrated. Patients with delirium or symptoms of confusion derived from organic or neurological disorders exhibit disorganised thinking and altered perceptions that can result in agitation, restlessness, and fear. Such delusions are fraught with negative emotions, not only for patients, but also for their families and caregivers or nurses. In contrast, the visions and dreams reported by these nurses had a very different effect. For the most part, they were a source of comfort for the patients, providing a sense of peace and, in some cases, a remarkable change in their behaviour and acceptance of death.

Erroneously diagnosing these experiences as having little value would be detrimental to the terminal patient’s



**ABOVE:** Dying patients often wish to share their dreams and visions with nurses or doctors, but a lack of training means that medical staff are not always sure of how to deal with such experiences.

FRED DUFOUR / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



ability to communicate, reach closure, and experience meaning at the end of life. These experiences, which are largely personal and subjective, are associated with peaceful and tranquil deaths. The themes of the dreams or visions related to an “imminent journey” could symbolise the process of leaving this world in preparation for the “great journey” towards death. Although most patients did not see this preparation as a painful experience, some clearly had a sense of urgency related to the details of the travel plans – that is, the destination and how to reach it.

According to the patients, deceased relatives and friends played an important role in the dreams – standing by their beds, watching them, and interacting with them. There was not much dialogue; indeed, sometimes the visions were totally “silent; however, patients announced that their mere presence transmitted a message of comfort and tranquillity, intuitively or telepathically”. Other patients reported

similar experiences with deceased relatives or “invisible companions, present for a purpose, namely, to escort them along the process or path and possibly help them move forward towards death”. Other similarities can be found in the literature, e.g. a messenger who guides the individual on the journey to death, or encounters with pets, friends, and relatives who await them.

## DECEASED RELATIVES AND FRIENDS PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE DREAMS

### MENTAL STATES OF THE DYING

Deathbed visions are found in the biographies of mystics and writers and in the literature of many cultures and times – for example, the Tibetan *Bardo*, the *Pert Em Hru* from Ancient Egypt, and the wood engravings of the *Ars Morendi* (The Art of Dying) of mediæval Europe. Other such visions are related by the mystical English Christian writer Julian of Norwich (1342–1416), in her work *Revelations of Divine Love*, which represents the spiritual preparation of the soul for death and life in the hereafter. The anecdotal accounts of nurses and doctors today suggest that these experiences may involve a much broader spectrum of phenomena than just deathbed visions. They include the transition to and from other realities, coincidences around the moment of death, often based on the appearance of a relative or close friend not physically present at the time, and the need to deal with unresolved issues, such as reconciling with distant family members or putting one’s affairs in order before dying.

The pain felt by relatives at the time of a patient’s death is part of the experience. Even so, many people who have witnessed or experienced these phenomena as intensely significant to them have sometimes then dismissed them as insignificant or mere hallucinations. Today, many people die in hospitals – away from their homes – but, unfortunately, nurses do not have the time or the training to deal adequately with this important aspect of the dying process.

Some nurses in care homes offered very moving testimonies about elderly people who had never or almost never received visits from their children or grandchildren. Once they did, however, they would die shortly afterwards – sometimes within hours or even minutes. Similar effects followed telephone calls (either from the elderly person to his or her families, or from the relatives to the home where the elderly person was living), news of legacies from a business or an inheritance, or even being given much appreciated books. Other stories involved reconnecting with a spouse, dictating instructions or recommendations to relatives or friends, and, even more surprising, receiving visits from relatives from faraway places, with the result that, within a few minutes to hours following the encounter with the dying person – even surrounded by other significant people they ended with his or her death. A nurse recounted her experience accompanying a terminal patient in the hospital:

“The patient was a relatively young man whose condition had very much deteriorated. When I came to the room, he wanted me to leave – he rejected me. After we discussed his feelings, he accepted me, and we talked about his family. He told me that he had problems with his 20-year-old daughter, with whom he had ‘outstanding issues’, as well as with his mother, his sister, and his wife. Then I noticed that his body and face began to change, with his appearance improving



ABOVE: The *Revelations of Divine Love* by Christian mystic Julian of Norwich details the 16 visions the mediæval anchoress experienced on what, at the time, she believed to be her deathbed.



remarkably. The night before he died, he told me he sensed an intense smell of flowers. He told me that a ‘shadow’ was trying to reach him, that someone had come looking for him. When he died, although his body was in bad shape, his face showed a great sense of calm and peace.”

The caretaker of a nursing home told me about the following experience, where she heard the voice of her deceased father on her mother’s deathbed: “I took some time to take care of my mother at home, and, when she died, I had her in my arms. Also present was my brother and a niece. I clearly heard my father’s voice calling her right before she died. He had died 24 years earlier, so, of course, I was not thinking about him. It may have been in my subconscious, but I clearly heard his voice calling her by her name. It was incredible!”

Other common stories are those of “a patient in an unconscious state dying just when the relatives have gone out to take a break”; “relatives who call the hospice just when the patient is deteriorating or is leaving”; or “a patient’s dog who howls at the moment his hospitalised owner dies”. In general, these cases are interpreted as a final and comforting message from family members that seems to occur independently of previous beliefs or expectations, and is usually attributed to designs (divine or cosmic), synchronicity (from a Jungian perspective), “significant” or amazing coincidences, or even some form of extrasensory perception.

## BREAKING THE TABOO

In my interviews, few doctors, nurses, or caregivers indicated that listening to these testimonies had affected their own spiritual or religious views; indeed, their private attitudes, based on their own experiences with patients, remained the same. But now they felt that, since the issue was a legitimate case for medical research, it was no longer taboo and could be discussed more openly. Almost all the nurses who experienced these events expressed their concern about the lack of education in these matters, adding that they expected these topics in general would become part of the academic curriculum and incorporated into teaching practice.

One nurse observed: “It is important that the nurses working in palliative care be prepared to face these incidents, because I feel that they are very common, and I think patients want to share them. They want to know if what they have experienced means something... They feel a certain sense of meaning in what is happening to them. I regret that nurses are not prepared to discuss these events with their patients. I think it is absolutely essential for nurses to be trained in this new speciality; if they do not have these skills, they should be given this opportunity.”

Recently in the United Kingdom, former nurse Penny Sartori carried out an extensive prospective study on near-death experiences.



COURTESY PENNY SARTORI

**ABOVE:** Penny Sartori worked as a nurse in the UK for 21 years, largely in intensive care, and has gone on to conduct extensive research into Near Death Experiences among hospital patients.

Sartori, who worked as a palliative care nurse, took care of many patients who were close to death. In the Netherlands, between 2009 and 2011, nurse Ineke Koedam conducted interviews with 30 caregivers from three different hospices. This study included two in-depth interviews with nurses; they completed a questionnaire that analysed their experiences and observations in the last five years, and a second one a year later. Their results showed that the answers to the second questionnaire had not changed substantially since the first one.

Doctors in general, nurses, geriatricians, and workers in palliative care are responsible for the care of the dying and those who mourn them; however, the spiritual care of the dying and knowledge about these experiences still do not form part of education in palliative care.

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✦ **ALEJANDRO PARRA** is a psychologist and psychotherapist in private practice. He teaches psychology at the Universidad Abierta Interamericana at Buenos Aires. For 15 years (1990-2004), he was editor of the *Revista Argentina de Psicología Paranormal* (Argentine Journal of Paranormal Psychology) and, since 2006, of the E-bulletin *Psi*. Since 1993, he has been President of the Institute of Paranormal Psychology ([www.alipisi.com.ar](http://www.alipisi.com.ar)). He is the former President of the Parapsychological Association (2011-2013), and is the author of 12 books, more than 300 articles in scholarly and popular



magazines, as well as several chapters in books. His latest English-language book is *The Last Farewell Embrace: spirituality, Near-Death Experiences, and Other Extraordinary Events Among Nurses* (Nova Science, 2019).



# CHUPACABRA@25

## REVISITING THE FIRST SIGHTING

**BENJAMIN RADFORD** revisits the first report of the chupacabra 25 years ago and reveals new details from the original eyewitness about the world's most famous cryptozoological vampire.

**E**ven amid the rarefied field of cryptozoological curiosities, the chupacabra [initially chupacabras; see FT85:9] stands out as an oddity. It is the only vampire among the likes of Nessie, Yeti, Bigfoot, Mothman and other such forteen brethren, said to suck blood from goats and other animals. It's also the only creature that has significantly changed form over the years. While most monster morphology remains fixed – big hairy bipedal sylvan creature here, big scaly saurian there – the chupacabra has appeared in at least three distinct forms over the years: humanoid alien, canid, and “other” (including raccoons and basically any dead, unidentified animal).

It's also the new kid on the block – a strapping young pup just 25 years old. As detailed in a previous article (FT271:30-35), the original eyewitness, a Puerto Rican woman named Madelyne Tolentino, described the creature based on the HR Giger-designed monster Sil in the sci-fi/horror film *Species*. The 25th anniversary of the chupacabra's sudden appearance offers the perfect opportunity to take a closer look at that very first sighting – the astonishing encounter that spawned a monster whose fame now rivals that of Bigfoot or Nessie.

### FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL

Most accounts of Tolentino's 1995 encounter offer only a brief summary of her description and little in the way of context. While key sightings of other monsters have received extensive analysis – Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin's 1967 alleged encounter with a Bigfoot, for example (FT360:32-39), or Chris Davis's 1988 sighting of the Lizard Man near a swamp (FT51:34-36, 333:26-34) – Tolentino's encounter received scant investigative attention, even at the time.

In the months after her sighting, the island of Puerto Rico was abuzz with rumours, tabloid stories, and reports about the mystery beast. Armed mobs patrolled



## THE CHUPACABRA WAS CULTURALLY APPROPRIATED BY THE REST OF THE WORLD

the streets searching for the creature, and the mayor of Canóvanas, Jose “Chemo” Soto, courted local press (and votes) by promising to protect the public from the terrifying menace.

However, as the years passed and no hard evidence of the vampire surfaced, interest waned. The chupacabra was culturally appropriated by the rest of the world via *The X-Files*, tabloid news stories and television shows, and by the time the first dead canid version appeared on a ranch outside of Managua, Nicaragua, in 2000, it had largely faded from Puerto Rico as a

**LEFT:** The ‘classic’ 1995 chupacabra sketch by Jorge Martín, here redrawn by the author.

threat. The chupacabra was commodified and commercialised, resembling Tolentino's original sighting less and less with each iteration and passing year. This explains the chupacabra's many forms, and why the current version bears little resemblance to what Tolentino saw back in 1995.

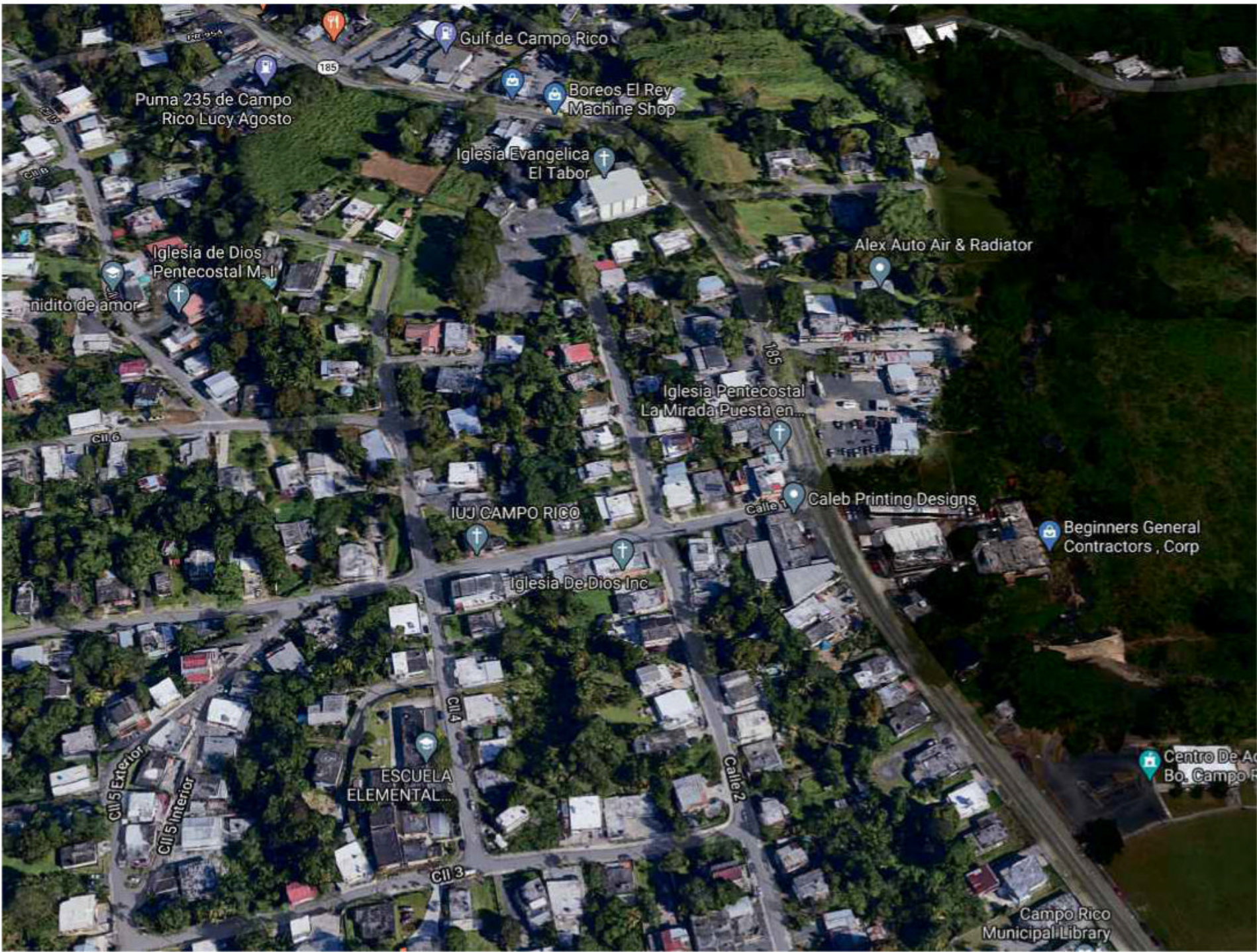
I spent five years researching the chupacabra for my 2011 book *Tracking the Chupacabra: The Vampire Beast in Fact, Fiction, and Folklore*. I interviewed Tolentino and I described her encounter with the monster. Space constraints prevented an in-depth analysis, so the full story of her original sighting has never been told. Many of the photographs and details appear here in print for the first time.

### TOLENTINO'S CHUPACABRA

The first chupacabra sighting took place in the small town of Barrio Campo Rico, in Canóvanas, Puerto Rico, a suburb of the capital, San Juan, near Calle 1 and Calle 2 and not far from the Iglesia De Dios church. It's a semi-rural area a few kilometres from the El Yunque rainforest (reputed to be the creature's home). The incident occurred at some point during the second week of August 1995 (Tolentino doesn't recall the date, but it was a weekday, which places it between August 7 and 11) and between 1pm and 4pm. She said the sighting lasted from three to five minutes, and although it happened near a fairly busy road, no other cars appeared during that time.

This article incorporates two in-depth interviews Tolentino gave: one in March 1996 to Lucy Pla and José Manuel Rodríguez of the Puerto Rican Research Group, translated into English and published in the 1997 Scott Corrales book *Chupacabras and Other Mysteries*; and an interview I conducted in 2010 with Tolentino and her (now ex) husband José Miguel Agosto at the location of her original sighting.<sup>1</sup>





**ABOVE:** Google Map of the neighbourhood where Tolentino's house was at the time of the chupacabra sighting. **BELOW:** Eyewitness Madelyne Tolentino at the spot where she first saw the chupacabra.

## THE 1995 CHUPACABRA ENCOUNTER: 1996

In her 1996 interview, Tolentino described the encounter:

“I was helping my mother, since she was getting ready to move into that location. I noticed that a vehicle was about to park right outside the house. I looked to make sure it wouldn’t block access to the house. Then I noticed that the fellow driving the car was frightened. His eyes opened wide, and he started backing out. His attitude led me to believe that someone was going to hit him or mug him. It made me go up against the glass window, which is quite wide and faces the front of the house. I then became aware of the creature, walking on two legs, apparently having come quite a distance, from the corner... It stood in front of the window I was looking out.”

The creature, said Tolentino, was “about four feet (1.2m) tall, more or less. At the time, it was walking like a human, on both legs. Its arms were drawn back in an ‘attack position’, as though it were a [TV] monster. It had three, long, skinny fingers.



The arms were also very long... Its legs were long and skinny, and I could see three separate toes... For a nose it had two little holes, and its mouth was a slash... I noticed something odd on its lower back... They were like feathers, but flat on its back. At no point did they rise. [In an interview conducted by Marc Davenport in February 1996, Madelyne said the ‘feathers’ became erect and moved rapidly from side to side]” (editorial comment in original). As to eye colour, Tolentino said in the interview that they were dark grey, though the interviewer notes: “In an earlier interview, Madelyne said the eyes appeared black.” (Later versions claimed the eyes were red, a detail which has become canonical.)

“It was such a weird creature that I even got down on the floor to see if it had genitals. It had nothing at all – it was ‘plain’ and sealed. I laughed, and said to my mother, ‘What the heck is this? Does it defecate through its mouth after it eats?’”

Tolentino described its “slow, robot-like movements, as if being controlled by someone... as if being guided by remote





**ABOVE LEFT:** The author with Madelyne Tolentino and José Miguel Agosto at the site of her 1995 chupacabra sighting. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The path to an overgrown area across the street from Tolentino's former home into which the chupacabra escaped. **BELOW:** The street where the chupacabra was last sighted by Tolentino.

control. Like a robot... Had that thing appeared in front of me, I would have run, but since it was behind the glass, and there was a gate outside the glass, I thought, 'That thing can't harm me in here.' Meanwhile, when my mother heard me scream [Tolentino didn't explain when or why she screamed, after feeling that she was safe from it] she decided to go out and grab the creature... The thing took off running. I'm not sure if it was because I screamed or not... It kind of hopped, like a kangaroo... It plunged into the woods over there, where you see that palm tree.

"My mother ran after it. I went outdoors, but stayed far away... My mother was in there trying to catch it. There was a kid on a bicycle who went crazy when he saw the creature. He threw broken bottles at it. My mother shouted to a neighbour, 'Catch it! There it goes!' When the creature heard what my mother shouted, it started running much faster than it had. Its feet weren't touching the ground. It was as if it had been suspended in the air, floating. Then it disappeared down that other street facing the church."

Tolentino added that a young boy who worked for José chased the monster down and opened its mouth: "A boy who works for my husband and is always willing to deal with animals keeps a pair of gloves in his car. He put them on and went into the woods to catch the creature. He says that, when he tried to grab the creature, it whipped out what I thought were feathers. He says that they stood straight up and that they were very long spines. The spines changed colour. He says he pried its mouth open and saw that it had really large fangs. He kept on trying to grab it and the thing ran into the

**"HE SAYS HE  
PRIED ITS MOUTH  
OPEN AND SAW  
THAT IT HAD  
REALLY LARGE  
FANGS"**



woods." At that point, the excitement ended. No police or press were summoned, and the incident wasn't mentioned again until over a month later when Tolentino's story was reported in tabloids such as *El Vocero* and local radio shows.

In re-examining her original account, we find an elaborate – and somewhat

implausible – account that goes beyond the creature's appearance. It's perhaps understandable that those who believe the chupacabra is real have elided much of Tolentino's report, but we cannot arbitrarily pick and choose which parts of her account to credit; if there's reason to suspect that she is misremembering, misrepresenting, or embellishing important details of her experience, there's reason to see all of it in a sceptical light.

### **THE 1995 CHUPACABRA ENCOUNTER: 2010**

In June 2010, I interviewed Tolentino and Agosto, both at her current home and at her previous residence, where the sighting had taken place. I found both of them to be open, helpful, and sincere, though Agosto had little to add since he had not been present. <sup>2</sup>

Tolentino's basic description of the creature didn't change significantly between 1996 and 2010 – though her description of the encounter itself did, offering a markedly different version of events. Tolentino told me that only she and her mother saw the creature. Tolentino was sleeping, and her mother woke her up shouting that she'd seen some strange animal outside.

In contrast with her 1996 account, Tolentino said that her mother did not leave the house, but instead the pair watched the creature as it stood outside the window for a while. "My mother said, 'I'm going to grab it,' and she opened the door and started to go out. I asked my mother, 'How are [you] so brave?'" It then floated (or hopped) toward tall grass in a vacant lot across the street and disappeared:



“We looked each other in the eyes, and I screamed... It was suspended in the air, left me without words, [then] disappeared into the tall grass.”

Tolentino corrected several mistakes in the famous drawing by UFO researcher Jorge Martín claimed to be based on her sighting. For example, the creature was about three feet tall (not four to five, as had been reported). As she had described earlier, at one point she stooped down to see if there were any sexual parts on the creature, but “it was ‘plain,’ there was nothing there at all. And the hair was short, so I would have seen if there had been any type of genitalia. This made me think it was not of this world.”

Furthermore, it did not have three fingers (as she stated in her 1996 interview) but instead five; and those five fingers did not end in claws, as was widely reported, but looked human. “There were no claws,” Tolentino stated categorically. “[I]t had human hands – not claws but long fingers and human-like nails. Its eyes were big and *achiandos* [“slanted”], and it didn’t have a nose, just two little dots. The creature’s skin was not brown but greyish... it looked like leather, wet and wrinkled. Its skin was like an extraterrestrial – but I never said it was an extraterrestrial. I have an interest in UFOs and aliens, but I never said it was either an extraterrestrial or an animal,” she told me. “I don’t know what it was. I’ve never changed my story.”

I asked her how it moved: “It was skipping like a kangaroo, but it had no tail. It did not touch the ground... it had no wings, but it came out like it was running as it approached.” (I asked Tolentino how it could be skipping *and* hopping *and* not touching the ground, but did not get an answer that really clarified this.)

The 1996 version told a dramatic story of how (after searching it for genitals) she doesn’t run or panic (or look for a camera), but instead makes a joke about it with her mother, then inexplicably screams. Her mother then bravely chases this bizarre, otherworldly creature to try and catch it. She fails, but a local boy manages to chase it into the woods, grab the monster and pry its mouth open, and then release it.

In the version she told me, none of this happened: She and her mother both stayed inside the house and watched as the creature floated (or skipped) away into a wooded area across the street. As for the brave boy who gave the weird creature an impromptu dental exam, despite apparently initially endorsing the boy’s story, Tolentino told me that it never happened: “Jose had a young worker who used to help him fix cars, and he ran out to see, but he did not see the chupacabra.” (It’s not clear whether Tolentino had come to doubt the boy’s account or whether his story had never been credibly proffered.)



**LEFT:** As Tolentino said, what she claimed to have seen in 1995 looked like the alien in the film *Species*.

time... Others were making up pictures for sensationalism, but I [reported it] because I have good vision and wanted to put it down as I saw it... I have the most information, and I have never changed my story.”

Whether Tolentino is aware of it or not, her story has indeed changed significantly. Memory is notoriously fallible under the best of circumstances, but it’s hard to reconcile the different versions of this original, influential chupacabra report. We don’t know, and at this remove can’t conclusively prove, what (if anything) she saw that day – what the floating, grey-skinned, long-fingered, spiky-backed alien humanoid figure was. But as Tolentino acknowledged in her 1996 interview, her “chupacabra” looks remarkably like a monster in a film she’d recently seen, “a movie called *Species*. It would be a very good idea if you saw it... It was a creature that looked like the chupacabra, with spines on

its back and all... The resemblance to the chupacabra was really impressive.”

## NOTES

**1** The details and descriptions from her 1996 interview may be considered more reliable than her more recent recollections, though it’s important to note that they are second- or third-hand, having been conducted in spoken Spanish, translated to written English, and then edited for publication. I mention this not to suggest that the interview is necessarily unreliable, but merely to note that in accounts of fortan events that rely wholly on a single eyewitness, as in this case, crucial details can be lost or changed over iterations. Though I speak passable Spanish (and both Tolentino and Agosto speak some English and Spanglish), native speakers confirmed my translations of key details from my recordings.

**2** Her husband Miguel was away at the time, looking for auto parts, but Tolentino reported in her 1996 interview that he later saw it: “Miguel says it was not walking, but floating in the air, defying the laws of gravity... It floated slowly.”

**3** Though otherwise credulous, to their credit the Puerto Rican researchers did note several contradictions between what Tolentino had previously told them and what they were hearing at the time of the 1996 interview, such as details concerning the eye colour and actions of the spikes or feathers on the creature’s spine.

◆ **BENJAMIN RADFORD** is a folklorist and author of several books on monsters including *Lake Monster Mysteries* (with Joe Nickell), *Tracking the Chupacabra*, and *Mysterious New Mexico*. His latest book is *Investigating Ghosts: The Scientific Search for Spirits*, and he is co-host of *Squaring the Strange* podcast.

## CONCLUSION

If Tolentino’s account is accurate and truthful, she has remarkable powers of observation; most witnesses would have only remembered a few of the most obvious features, but she spills out detail after detail of description, from its eye colour (albeit several different answers) to the number of toes on its feet to its missing anus.

The members of the Puerto Rican Research Group apparently didn’t conduct any investigation beyond interviewing Tolentino months after the fact. There is no corroborating evidence of Tolentino’s story, no physical proof or traces, nor any photos or other eyewitness. In all, based on her 1996 account, there would seem to be at least a half dozen potential eyewitnesses to the sighting: Tolentino; her mother (who was unavailable to be interviewed due to infirmity), the (unnamed) local boy (who may or may not have chased the monster and pried its mouth open, but may have been present and seen *something*); one or more neighbours; and the man in a vehicle whose parking habits brought Tolentino to the window in the first place. Not one of them has come forward to corroborate her account or offer their recollections; of course, if the version she told me in 2010 is to be credited, they either don’t exist or have nothing to say.<sup>3</sup>

Tolentino told me: “Most people have believed me, people trust me and know I’m telling the truth. The whole experience seemed both real and unreal at the same





## KING OF CANADA

70 years since his death, SD TUCKER assesses the extraordinary career of Canada's longest-serving PM, Mackenzie King, who spent half a lifetime conferring with dead dogs and departed politicians, before trying to strike a paranormal peace-pact with Hitler.

Stereotypically, Canada seems perhaps the dullest land on Earth, with a political life of stable, centrist consensus. Yet this reputation may not be entirely deserved, as shown by the story of Canada's three-time Prime Minister, William Lyon MacKenzie King (1874-1950), the country's rough equivalent to Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee combined, who held office for a total of 21 years between 1921 and 1948. King led his country through WWII with such a steady hand that Canada came out better off than before the conflict began, with GDP doubling, while contributing more troops to the D-Day invasion than anyone besides the US and Britain.

It would be churlish to deny Mr King was a great man... but he was also an incredibly tedious one. Hardly Churchillian in manner, he was even more self-effacing than Attlee. In a 1946 survey, only eight per cent of Canadians said they admired their leader, in spite of his obvious service to them and their freedom. Far more exciting was King's Scots-Canadian grandfather, William Lyon Mackenzie (1795-1861), Toronto's first mayor, who in 1837 led an armed uprising against colonial rule before serving as President of a short-lived rebel enclave, the 'Republic of Canada' in 1837-38. Considering it his sacred duty to finish what his ancestor had started, it was King who negotiated Canada's decoupling from Britain, ultimately winning it the status of an autonomous nation. Rather than being ruled by the King, Canada was now ruled by King instead, and his triumphs were legion; he set up Canada's first sovereign Foreign Office and the Bank of Canada, as well as Canada's welfare state.

The war over, in 1946 King passed the Canadian Citizenship Act, which for the first time legally defined inhabitants as full-blown Canadians, not mere British subjects. On 3 January 1947, he received Canadian Citizenship Number 0001, thus making him literally first among equals. His only flaw was his dullness. But then, following his death in 1950 aged 75, it was revealed that, from his student days in 1893, King had



LEFT: William Lyon Mackenzie King, three-time Canadian Prime Minister.

been meticulously keeping a candid diary, some 30,000 pages in length – and, when its contents were revealed, it turned out he wasn't so boring after all... <sup>1</sup>

### MR KING AND WEIRD WILLIE

Mackenzie King was a classic Jekyll and Hyde figure, later given the shared moniker of 'Mr King and Weird Willie'; the classic account of his bipolar existence is historian CP Stacey's 1976 best-seller *A Very Double Life*. King had intended editing his diaries down into a memoir, desiring many portions be destroyed. However, reports of their contents quickly leaked after his death.

Once able to hang onto power "like a lobster with lockjaw", had King's secrets emerged earlier, his vice-like grip could have been loosened. A lifelong bachelor who appeared married to the job, he emerged as a surprising youthful frequenter of prostitutes – but only to save their souls for Jesus, not to sleep with them. Stacey speculated otherwise, helping shift extra copies.

More irrefutable was the fact that King was enamoured with another world; it turned out that he was a committed amateur psychical researcher, who may even have allowed his many escapades in this field to sway his conduct in politics. King was not a Spiritualist *per se*, but a lifelong Presbyterian. Yet, corresponding with the day's top spook-hunters like Nandor Fodor and Hereward Carrington (of whose American Psychical Institute he was a covert member under a false name), and attending so many séances, he was bound to end up mixing with adherents of the Spiritualist faith. King was always superstitious. Thinking himself a sort of 'Mackenzie King Arthur', and his political colleagues fellow Knights of the Round Table, the PM fantasised he had a mission from God to bring about the Holy Geopolitical Grail of peace, and saw divine messages all around him. Daily, randomly-

chosen Bible passages guided him about which paths to pursue; he would look at clocks only to find that their hands lying in certain 'significant' positions confirmed he was on the right track. God and ghosts even communicated via shaving-foam. His diary entry for 20 January 1948 tells of a waking vision of the spirit of silent-movie star Mary Pickford, indicating that a speech he was due to give that day "would be an historic one". Then, parsing the patterns formed by his lather in the bathroom, he saw "a huge eagle with its wings outspread" being assaulted by a polar-bear, only to be thwarted by "a joyous youth who seemed to have great vitality, pushing the bear away." Such simulacra were "as clear as if... cut in marble," and told of Cold War tensions between American Eagle and Russian Bear; that the bear was being beaten meant the Free World was winning this Manichean struggle because of "the new light and life that is coming into the world" thanks to the shining efforts of speechifying Grail-Knights like himself. <sup>2</sup>



## 'KING RIDICULOUS

King initially rejected the paranormal. Reading a book on Spiritualism in 1902, he threw it away in disgust. He believed in an afterlife, but felt the amazing feats of physical mediums of the DD Home/Eusapia Palladino type were just conjuring tricks. The turning-point came via bereavement. Within the three years of 1915-17, his sister, father and mother all died. His mother's death hit him hardest, and he created a shrine in his house, thinking her spirit was guiding him in dreams.

Lonely, he sought company in man's best friend, getting an Irish Terrier named Pat in 1924. King talked to the pet so much he thought it was human, and in psychic linkage with his mother. When kneeling in worship at Mrs King's portrait, Pat licked King's feet – a sure sign of their innate spiritual connection. When this "Angel Dog" fell ill, King sought medical advice from the ghost of Louis Pasteur, but when a watch fell on the floor and stopped at 10 past five, King realised Pat would die at this same hour the next morning – which he did, albeit not before being given messages from King to pass on to his relatives. King actually postponed a meeting of the Cabinet War Committee to perform this solemn duty. In 1941, Pat was replaced with Pat II, who was also fully human. "We spoke together of the Christ-child," King once confided to his diary. So human was Pat II that, when offered the Order of Merit by George VI in 1947, King toyed with it being given to the dog instead, even though Pat II had just died. Naturally, both Pats' spirits returned to hear their master's voice again after death.<sup>3</sup>

In 1926, King consulted a fortune-teller who, after psychometrising his handkerchief, correctly predicted his next election victory. Yet she also predicted 1930 would be a good time for him to call another election... which he then lost. King realised ghosts' and psychics' opinions were like everyone else's – fallible, at least in policy matters. As such, King's basic future rule was to come to a tentative decision himself, then seek otherworldly reassurance that he had made the correct choice. Even his decision about the 1930 election turned out to be a wise one, for five years out of office gave him time to examine Spiritualism properly; he even consulted the ghost of the top Victorian SPR man FWH Myers for his views. At some séances, King's diary reveals, "Queen Victoria and Anne Boleyn came, but I do not remember what they said." Detroit medium Etta Wriedt made a silver trumpet



ABOVE: King communes with Pat the Irish Terrier; on his death, the "Angel Dog" was charged with delivering messages to his owner's deceased relatives. BELOW: Etta Wriedt was one of the numerous mediums King consulted.

## KING TALKED TO THE PET SO MUCH HE THOUGHT IT WAS HUMAN

jump around for King before eerie voices emerged from it, but London was home of the world's best mediums. There in 1947 for the Royal Wedding, he sought out Geraldine Cummins, an Irishwoman whose plays had once been performed at Dublin's Abbey Theatre. Cummins connected King with the soul of his old war-time ally

President Franklin D Roosevelt, who had created an all-star "brains-trust" cabinet of dead statesmen to advise him: "You will not know how we come, but when you sleep we will put suggestions into your mind." This cabinet sought both to avert a secret Wall Street plan to annex Canada, and to determine whether or not the elderly King should retire. "Say, Mac, it is kind of you to come... Don't retire, stay on the job, your country needs you," said FDR, before ordering he improve his diet. "I want you to retain Canada's independence. There are a bunch of roughnecks in finance in the USA. They would like to get hold of Canada

through economic penetration." Worse, "that cheerful cut-throat, Joe Stalin" sought to flood the country with Commie spies. Only King's continued leadership could ensure that, while "the 19th century was the century of the USA, the 20th century will be Canada's century," as while King was "not clever, you are wise." But when King changed his own mind about his departure, FDR did likewise. Standing down in 1948, King was advised by Roosevelt to "live like a vegetable for a while" and regenerate, as he would soon be needed again to save the world when the Cold War got hotter over in Asia, an alleged forecast of the Korean War. King passed Churchill transcripts of FDR's talks, but to only polite interest.<sup>4</sup>

## THE LION KING

The most notable example of King allowing his superstition to influence his statecraft came when, in June 1937, he managed to gain a personal audience in Berlin with none other than Adolf Hitler. Meeting Hitler was "the day for which I was born," Weird Willie thought, something confirmed by manifold signs and wonders. On the train from Paris, he saw a cloud which looked like a "seated lion" facing towards Germany; on a visit to Berlin Zoo, he observed some more lions (not *that* surprising, perhaps), and patted one cub's head; and he saw a pair of stone lions flanking the steps of a museum. Even better, another lion-statue bore the date '1874', the year of his own birth. These were symbols of "security" and "strength"; the Imperial British Lion, as embodied by his





ABOVE: King visited Nazi Germany in 1937 for an audience with Hitler, who gave him a signed photo (below).

own good self, William *Lyon* Mackenzie King, would continue to roar strongly, thanks to his holy mission to Naziland. Opening his Bible, he read a passage in which St Paul is assured that, when brought before Cæsar, God would protect the safety of his shipmates; Britannia's Ship of State would thus fail to be torpedoed by that modern-day Cæsar, the Führer. The night prior to the meeting, King made sure to sleep beneath a blanket of Mackenzie tartan, in psychic communion with his Scottish ancestors, feeling "the whole Mackenzie clan were communicating in my diplomatic mission and telling me what to do." Their advice could not have been very good, as Hitler then duped King entirely.

Entering Adolf's chamber, King produced a deluxe biography of himself, planted it on Hitler's desk, and began showing him photos. Hitler politely pretended to be interested as Mackenzie told how, having been born by divine fiat in the town of Berlin, Ontario, he "understood the German people very well." Hitler reacted "in a very friendly way" and offered a signed photograph of himself in uniform in return. Handsome Herr Hitler had himself a new fan. Like a teenage girl, King later gushed over Adolf in his Dear Diary, swooning over "a sort of appealing and affectionate look in his eyes," which had "a liquid quality about them" indicating "profound sympathy" for all. Moreover, "his skin was smooth," he was "very nice and sweet" and "eminently wise" and appeared "particularly strong on beauty, loves flowers, and will spend more of the money of the State on gardens and flowers than on most other things." Panzers excepted.

In Hitler, King saw a *doppelgänger* of himself: "As I talked to him, I could not but think of Joan of Arc. He is distinctly a mystic... The German people... feel that he was [on] a mission from God... [but]

he dislikes any of them thinking of him as anything but a humble citizen who is trying to serve his country well. He is a teetotaler and also a vegetarian. Is unmarried, abstemist in all his habits and ways... very much of a recluse... deeply religious... he believes strongly in God." Given Hitler's obvious excellence of character, King had no qualms in believing his host's honest assurances that he had "no desire" to begin any war, and that, in fact, Britain and France were the true aggressors in 1930s Europe. As he left Hitler's room, a very happy Mackenzie "wished him well in his efforts to help mankind." Later, he even pondered whether or not Poland was somehow to blame for its own invasion. <sup>5</sup>

## IDYLLS OF THE KING

The only true consequence of the King of Comedy's trip to Berlin was to help confirm the Nazi view that Western democratic leaders were weak and naïve – or possibly insane. In 1939, leafing through an old



Christmas present, *Richard Wagner: The Story of an Artist*, King realised his choice of reading matter had been directed by his mother, hinting that knowing your Wagner was the key to understanding Hitler's soul. Thus, wrote King, to negotiate with Nazis: "One should become saturated with Wagner. Wagner's music has possessed Germany – his philosophy [along] with it. Hitler loves his music... and doubtless has imbibed [Wagner's] philosophy." Which was what, exactly? "I believe Hitler to be like Wagner in his beliefs on reincarnation... [and] like Wagner [in] believing in compassion as the thing to aim at... the ultimate perfection in purity of living. This may cause him in the end not to yield to force... Like Wagner, he may become, or strive to become, [the tripartite reincarnation of the German mythical heroes] Siegfried-Amfortas-Parsifal..." Wagner's operas embody the "ultimate triumph of good, through suffering and sacrifice," like Christ on the cross; and was not the Nazi swastika just another form of "crooked cross" and Hitler a second Jesus? Wagner teaches us that "pity is holding [Hitler's] sword" of war in its sheath, meaning "It will be Christ who will win out in the end" in the battle to possess Hitler's soul. "The German [Grail-] Knights were not 'milk and water' men, they were... ready to fight if need be [but] their higher natures overcame their lower" thanks to the influence of "the supernatural" on their souls. That German defences were called the 'Siegfried Line' revealed Hitler's hidden belief he was Siegfried reincarnate, "obliged to come in humble circumstances into the world" and that he would be reborn again later as Parsifal, the warrior-knight who, in Wagner, ultimately ended up guided not by violence but "by compassion". Like John Bunyan, who wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* in prison, Hitler penned *Mein Kampf* behind bars too, showing how his soul would progress to "greater heights of manhood" from the slough of sabre-rattling despond.

Hitler lived in Berchtesgaden, 'Berchta' being an old German goddess, subliminally representing "some deity... a woman who symbolised something [Hitler] did not know what." But who was Adolf's Queen Guinevere, guiding the hitherto errant knight on his spiritual pilgrim-quest of moral progress? As with King, it turned out to be his dear old mum: "I am convinced [Hitler] is a Spiritualist... [as proven by] his going to his parents' grave at the time of his great victory, the annexation of Austria... [I admire] his devotion to his mother – that mother's spirit is, I am certain, his guide and no one who does not understand this relationship... can understand" Hitler's actions. When Adolf spoke of himself "following his star of destiny, just as a somnambulist walks in his sleep", maybe this 'star' was Mrs Hitler's ghost? King believed in a "process of spiritual evolution", driven by political





pilgrims like himself and Hitler introducing the “right policies” independently, until ultimately humanity itself “all become of one mind”, thus becoming “like-minded with Christ” and “one with God”, at which point any *one* man would be *every* man, leading to peace in our time. Thus, King’s vain delusion that Hitler was just like him, only German, becomes understandable.

Thankfully, King’s strategy during the war itself was not guided quite as closely by The Great Beyond. On 28 August 1939, a small blue flower snapped its stem and toppled onto King’s table. This, he saw, was a sign that “some decision has been made” over in Germany. Sadly, it was the decision to invade Poland. On 29 August, King saw a cloud which resembled his mother’s head, looking for all the world like an “ectoplasm formation – but much more beautiful.” Did this mean peace would come after all?

On 2 September, King held a table-rapping session in which his dead father announced the news that the Führer had just been assassinated by an angry Pole. “War will be averted,” confirmed his mum. King waited for official corroboration of the news to come though... and waited... and waited. Why did it never arrive? In his diary, King speculated that either a lying spirit has come in somewhere, or subconscious wishes [sometimes] dictate the words expressed [by the table]. Men may be guided by evil spirits or by good spirits. Shaken, King essentially laid off séances throughout the war, consulting Ouija boards and mediums but rarely, and mainly about trivia like his dead pets “hunting for rabbits and squirrels” in Doggy-Heaven. King himself passed over to join them in July 1950, five years after the holy war against the Führer-Parsifal had ended.<sup>6</sup>

## THE KING IS DEAD

King’s reputation is today exploited by organisers of ghost tours, with Mackenzie House, the former home of King’s rebel grandfather, billed as ‘the most haunted



house in Toronto’. It’s now a museum, but in 1960 the *Toronto Telegram* claimed the home’s caretakers had spotted the apparitions of both “a short, frock-coated man” – probably Mackenzie Sr himself – and “the spectral figure of a woman with long hair”, before hearing phantom footsteps on the stairs, a self-playing piano and an antique printing-press starting up by itself. The phantasmal lady even slapped one witness’s face in her bed. Actually, the story was invented by the House’s wantaway owners to drum up interest in the place. After an Archdeacon performed a televised blessing there, the house was snapped up by the City of Toronto, with the official list of contents, built-in as part of the deal, including “one ghost (exorcised)”. The only true link with spirits at Mackenzie House comes in a dedicatory panel unveiled by the dead rebel’s grandson, whose inscription honours the “PIONEERS OF FREEDOM” who had once risen up against colonial rule. In King’s secret diary, he admitted these very words had been ghost-written for him by his ancestor from beyond the grave.

The two most haunted houses in Ottawa, meanwhile, once belonged to Mackenzie King himself. Laurier House, the former residence of Canada’s seventh PM, Sir Wilfrid Laurier (1841-1919), whom King had known in both life and death, was donated to King in 1921 and served as a base for his séances; the soul of Laurier himself was known to drop back in from time to time. One room contains both the shrine to King’s beloved mother and a crystal ball, gifted by a London Spiritualist. In 1991, a tourist spied Mrs King staring out at her from within this uncanny item. King’s country retreat of Kingsmere, north of Ottawa, is also unquiet. In June 1954, a *New York Times* journalist, Percy J Philip, was sitting in the grounds when King himself suddenly manifested, seeking informed chat about current affairs. Before vanishing back behind the veil, King revealed that “We have two worlds. Those people who think their world is the only

LEFT: King at the shrine to his mother at Laurier House, and the crystal ball given him by a London Spiritualist.

one... have a very dull time.”<sup>7</sup> In spite of initial appearances, a dull time was the very last thing Weird Willie had enjoyed throughout his long and double life. It’s always the quiet ones, isn’t it?

## NOTES

**1** King’s diaries are online at [www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/politics-government/prime-ministers/william-lyon-mackenzie-king/Pages/diaries-william-lyon-mackenzie-king.aspx](http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/politics-government/prime-ministers/william-lyon-mackenzie-king/Pages/diaries-william-lyon-mackenzie-king.aspx); they are fully searchable by keyword if readers wish to mine them for further eccentricities.

**2** *Diary*, Jan 20 1948; King saw numerological messages everywhere. 10 and 30 were particularly significant. 10 appeared within the word ‘radio’ if you inexplicably wrote it as ‘rad10’, for example, while his diary paper had holes punched in it. There were three holes, each of which, incredibly, was circular: three circles equals ‘3-0’ or ‘30’, naturally. He read tea-leaves, too. When some looked like a bear, he thought it referred to his mother ‘bearing’ him. CP Stacey, *A Very Double Life: The Private World of Mackenzie King*, Macmillan of Canada, 1976, pp.176-7

**3** Stacey, pp.139-44. King’s watch actually stopped at 5.25, demonstrating yet again his unerring capacity for total self-delusion.

**4** For much fuller accounts of King’s career in psychical research than can be provided here, see Stacey, pp.160-204; [www.gedmartin.net/published-work-mainmenu-11/268-w-l-mackenzie-king-canada-s-spiritualist-prime-minister](http://www.gedmartin.net/published-work-mainmenu-11/268-w-l-mackenzie-king-canada-s-spiritualist-prime-minister); [https://qspacelibrary.queensu.ca/bitstream/handle/1974/5348/Bullock\\_Allison\\_C\\_200911\\_MA.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://qspacelibrary.queensu.ca/bitstream/handle/1974/5348/Bullock_Allison_C_200911_MA.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y); <https://archive.macleans.ca/article/1951/12/15/the-secret-life-of-mackenzie-king-spiritualist>; <http://houdini.org/MackenzieKingandSpiritualism.html>

**5** <https://junobeach.org/canada-in-wwii/articles/aggression-and-impunity/w-l-mackenzie-kings-diary-june-29-1937/>; <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/he-loves-flowers-the-insane-true-story-of-the-day-canadas-prime-minister-met-hitler>; [www.cjnews.com/news/canada/mackenzie-kings-forgotten-visit-to-nazi-germany](http://www.cjnews.com/news/canada/mackenzie-kings-forgotten-visit-to-nazi-germany); [www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/fyi/mackenzie-king-meets-the-fuhrer-131909873.html](http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/fyi/mackenzie-king-meets-the-fuhrer-131909873.html)

**6** Roy MacLaren, *Mackenzie King in the Age of the Dictators*, McGill-Queens University Press, 2019, pp.245-6; Joy E Esbrey, *Knight of the Holy Spirit: A Study of William Lyon Mackenzie King*, University of Toronto Press, 1980, pp.209-15; Stacey, 1976, pp.190-2, 195-6; *Diary*, Aug 27, 28, 29, 30, 1939; Geraldine Cummins’s medium friend Hester Dowden made her own attempts to invade the brains of wartime leaders, viewing Hitler not as evil but as an empty vessel, whose skull bore “an infinite capacity for receiving influences” from both bright and dark spirits, due to his “colossal egotism”. The *real* war, therefore, took place within Hitler’s mind. This opinion coincides with Mackenzie’s own; did Dowden give him the idea in the first place? They did meet for sittings.

**7** [www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/once-upon-a-city-archives/2017/01/12/once-upon-a-city-torontos-original-firebrand-leaves-spirited-legacy.html](http://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/once-upon-a-city-archives/2017/01/12/once-upon-a-city-torontos-original-firebrand-leaves-spirited-legacy.html); [www.torontoghosts.org](http://www.torontoghosts.org); <https://globalnews.ca/news/4613378/mackenzie-house-toronto/>; John Robert Colombo, *Mysteries of Ontario*, Hounslow Press, 1999, pp.170-2.



# BIKE IS BEST

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## Of mystics and mellow fruitfulness

**LISA GLEDHILL asks whether an eccentric Victorian ritual could take on new meaning in the era of global food networks and pandemics.**

**T**ucked into a hillside on the north west coast of Cornwall is a curious little driftwood hut, built in the late 1830s as a man-cave by the eccentric Vicar of Morwenstow, Robert Stephen Hawker. He'd come here to watch for ships in distress, write poetry and take opium – and, of the three, it was his philanthropic role as unofficial coast-guard that was thought to be the most unusual hobby for a clergyman. But even by 21<sup>st</sup> century standards, let alone those of the 19<sup>th</sup>, Robert Stephen Hawker was a remarkably independent thinker.

The stories about his eccentricities were widely re-told – and probably widely exaggerated – even during his lifetime. Did he really excommunicate a cat? Or sit on a rock pretending to be a mermaid?<sup>1</sup> Probably not. He did dress flamboyantly for a man of his era and profession, favouring a claret-coloured coat and yellow poncho. He did marry; firstly, a woman 20 years his senior and secondly, a woman 40 years his junior. And he did write powerful, stirring romantic verse celebrating Cornish landscape and identity, and the mystical quest for the Holy Grail.<sup>2</sup>

But the part of his legacy that most of us will be familiar with in Britain today is the Church Harvest Festival. All those altar-displays of corn dollies, artisan bread and autumn fruits, all those school collections of tinned food for the old folks, even the apple-harvest photographs in *The Wicker Man*, were inspired by the Reverend Hawker. Until he came along, the main established



religion in the UK hadn't realised what a great idea it would be to make a religious celebration of getting the crops in.

Of course, harvest festivities are as old as farming itself, but in Christian England they were usually a secular festival enjoyed by landowners, workers and their dependents as a reward for the year's hard work. Many folklorists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries have claimed a pagan religious origin for traditions, such as choosing harvest kings and queens or games such as 'crying the neck', but these claims are now widely regarded as tenuous.<sup>3</sup> Giving charity to the poor has been a part of Christian tradition from the earliest days of the faith, and was done throughout the year, but especially at midwinter. It seems remarkable that it took nearly 2,000 years for one slightly batty Cornish vicar to bring both traditions together to create one of the most popular events in the Church calendar. But perhaps it was just a question of good timing. As Charles Fort said: "A tree cannot find out, as it were, how to blossom, until comes blossom-time. A social growth cannot find out the use of steam engines, until comes steam-engine-time."<sup>4</sup> Maybe the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Harvest Festival time...

The spread of industrialisation during

the 1800s created a compensatory wave of romantic idealisation of nature and rural life in art and literature. The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also saw a rise in the academic study of pre-Christian religions, especially nature-based traditions, which culminated in the 1890 publication of James Frazer's mythological blockbuster *The Golden Bough*. The cross-pollination of these cultural strands created fertile ground for Hawker's quirky little ritual to take root. Hawker himself had no romantic illusions about the rough and ready rural poor of his parish and although not a conventional Anglican, he certainly wasn't a Pagan in either the ancient or modern sense. He was a Christian mystic in the mould of William Blake, navigating his own personal spiritual path; but his Harvest Festival idea struck a chord with a later generation of clergymen who picked it up and made it mainstream. It's usually celebrated around the Autumn Equinox, but can be held in October depending on local preference, and has even been adapted by some nonconformist and Catholic churches. As a deathbed convert to Catholicism, Hawker would surely approve.

In the UK today, all kinds of food are available at all times of year – at

**LEFT:** Hawker's hut at Morwenstow, Cornwall. **BELOW:** Robert Stephen Hawker in 1864.

least for those who can afford it. For the less fortunate, reliance on food banks, free school meals and other support is a year-round reality, not something tied to the traditional seasonal cycles of feast and famine. So does the notion of a harvest celebration still have any relevance? For the religiously inclined, celebrating the seasonal blessings of a god or gods still has spiritual meaning even if the practical importance of harvest season has dwindled. But what about secular society?

Back in March, when Covid-19 confined most of us to our homes, many people found comfort – some for the first time – in watching Spring unfold. Restrictions have now eased, but for lots of people this heightened awareness of nature and its cycles will continue. During the same period, we've also all become expert epidemiologists, able to discuss R values, herd immunity and the ethics of wet markets. Regardless of political views and whether we take a religious, romantic or scientific approach, there is a greater awareness that our interactions with each other and with the natural world have measurable consequences on a global scale. Perhaps the time is right for a new social ritual that recognises that in all aspects of life, we reap what we sow.

### NOTES

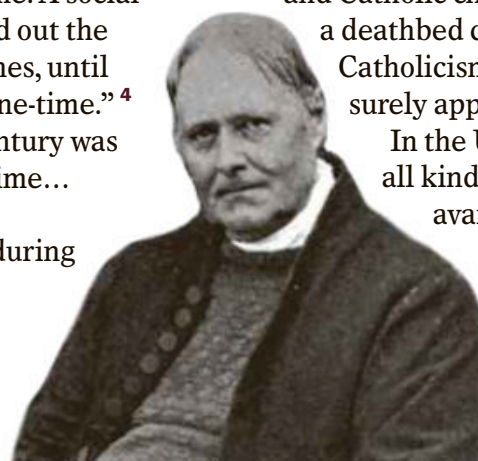
**1** *The Vicar of Morwenstow, Being a Life of Robert Stephen Hawker* (1876) by Sabine Baring-Gould.

**2** See [www.robertstephenhawker.co.uk/](http://www.robertstephenhawker.co.uk/) for a list of Hawker's publications and further information on his life and work.

**3** See *The Stations of the Sun* (1996) by Ronald Hutton.

**4** Charles Fort, *Lo!* (1931).

◆ **LISA GLEDHILL** is a film maker and writer with a long-standing interest in forteana. She is a regular contributor to FT.





## The music of the spheres

**ANDREW MAY** explores the celestial harmonies of Johannes Kepler and their modern-day revival in musical-astronomical collaborations.

Johannes Kepler lived at the same time as Galileo, and shared his interest in planetary motion. His contributions to the field were significant enough for NASA to name its first planet-hunting space telescope after him. But while Galileo had the materialistic viewpoint of a modern scientist – and famously got into conflict with the Church – Kepler saw things in a completely different way.

From 1601 to 1612 his official position was Imperial Mathematician to the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II – which sounds scientific enough, until you recall Rudolf’s obsession with the occult (he was also a patron of Edward Kelley and John Dee). For Kepler, there was no incompatibility between the scientific and the mystical, as his biographer David Love writes: “These two aspects of his work were always an integrated whole... he was taking a single unified approach to nature, which he saw as the creation of a mathematically motivated deity.”<sup>1</sup>

This comes across as clearly as anywhere in Kepler’s work on the “music of the spheres”. Even in his own time this was an old concept, going back to the Ancient Greek philosophers. To them, the planets really did revolve on invisible spheres – centred on the Earth rather than the Sun – and they believed that these spheres were arranged in simple ratios analogous to strings vibrating in musical harmony.

Like Galileo, Kepler understood that the planets go round the Sun rather than the



ABOVE LEFT: Johannes Kepler. ABOVE RIGHT: The musical scales of the planets in Kepler’s *Harmonices Mundi*.

Earth. He also knew that sound is a wave that travels through air, with musical pitch being governed by the frequency of oscillation. In modern terms, frequency is measured in hertz, or oscillations per second. The piano keyboard, for example, spans approximately 30 to 4,000 Hz. But any regularly repeating cycle can be measured in hertz – even the Earth’s orbit around the Sun, which takes a year to complete. With a frequency of just 32 nanohertz, that’s much too low to hear – but at least it gives a tenuous validity to the concept of a “music of the spheres”.

Thinking along these lines, Kepler transformed the notion from the literal sound imagined by the ancient Greeks into an intellectual abstraction. In his own words, “the celestial motions are nothing else than a continuous heavenly music which can be perceived only with the mind, not with the ear.” That’s a quote from his book *Harmonices Mundi* (“Harmony of the World”) dating from 1619. Although it’s padded out with a lot of mystical speculation, the book has an important place in the history of science because it’s where Kepler formulated the last of his three laws of planetary motion. The first stated that planets

*“A continuous heavenly music which can be perceived only with the mind”*

move around the Sun in elliptical orbits, not circular ones, while the other two describe how a planet’s speed varies around its orbit, and from one planet to another.

We now know that these laws are unavoidable consequences of the way gravity works, but for Kepler they were simply part of the creator’s design spec for the Solar System. Obviously, there was some rationale behind them, so why not a musical one? His three laws described how planetary speeds vary in the course of an orbit, and from that he could determine the corresponding frequency (which likewise varies over time). He then arrived at his version of the music of the spheres – which he wrote out in standard notation – by scaling those frequencies up into the audible range.

It’s an interesting exercise – and one that scientist John

Rodgers and musician Willie Ruff repeated using modern data in 1979. They chose their scaling factor so that Earth’s average frequency – the 32 nanohertz mentioned earlier – translates to 800 Hz in the audible range. But it’s not a constant tone, because the ellipticity of the Earth’s orbit means the frequency wobbles by roughly a semitone – from G to G-sharp in Rodgers and Ruff’s system. Kepler discovered this semitone wobble too, which he interpreted as an oscillation between the notes *mi* and *fa* in the *do-re-mi* system. Since nothing happened by accident in Kepler’s worldview, this obviously conveyed some important message from the Creator. “The Earth sings *mi-fa-mi*,” he wrote, “so that even from the syllables you may guess that in this home of ours misery and famine hold sway.”

The other planets play tunes of their own: the inner ones, Mercury and Venus, at higher frequencies and the outer ones – only Mars, Jupiter and Saturn being known in Kepler’s time – at lower frequencies. The last two are particularly interesting, as Rodgers and Ruff point out:

“Jupiter’s song covers a minor third, from D down to B just below the bass staff. Still farther





out and still lower is Saturn. Its range is a major third, from B down to G, the B at the top being just an octave below the B at the bottom of Jupiter's range. Thus the two planets together define a major triad, and it may well have been this concord that made Kepler certain he had cracked the code and discovered the secret of the celestial harmony."<sup>2</sup> (This may sound cryptic to non-musicians, but it's just saying that the notes G, B and D make up the harmonious chord of G major).

In Kepler's time, planetary motions were the only regularly repeating phenomena known in astronomy. Since then, many other examples have been discovered – on a vast range of frequencies from far below the audio spectrum to far above it. By applying the same scaling procedure, any of these can be converted into a modern-day "music of the spheres". The process has become so well-established – among space geeks at least – that it's been given a formal name: astronomical sonification.

One of the most widely heard examples was produced by the European Space Agency in 2014, as part of its social media blitz during the Rosetta mission to comet 67P. Called "The Singing Comet", this particular sonification was based on oscillations in the comet's magnetic field. Occurring at very low frequencies between 40 and 50 millihertz, these were scaled up by a factor of 10,000 to make them audible. The result received almost six million listens on SoundCloud, and was widely reported by news outlets around the world.<sup>3</sup>

Another potential source of outer space sounds is radio astronomy – an obvious one, given the use of radio for sound broadcasting on Earth. In fact, the sonification of radio signals has more than entertainment value, since it can be used alongside visualisation as an aid to data analysis. In this context, the science of "acoustic astronomy" was created by Fiorella Terenzi, when she was working on her doctoral thesis at the University of California in 1987. She used



ABOVE: The Grateful Dead's Mickey Hart performs his *Musica Universalis* at New York's Hayden Planetarium in 2018.

a computer sound synthesis program – still quite a novelty in those days – to convert radio telescope data from the galaxy UGC 6697 into audible form.

Now a professor at Florida International University, Terenzi has applied the same technique to many other astronomical phenomena, ranging from the Sun and the planets Jupiter and Saturn to distant pulsars, quasars and X-Ray binaries. You can hear a selection of samples on her website.<sup>4</sup>

It's a bit of a stretch to describe the sonifications we've met so far as "music" – but some people have taken the idea a step further. In 2011, astronomers Alex Parker and Melissa Graham produced a *Supernova Sonata* based on data from 241 supernova events, with all the musical elements – pitch, volume, instrumentation and so on – determined by different astrophysical parameters.<sup>5</sup> The following year a similar exercise was reported on a NASA blog, this time using data from a gamma ray burst, which was converted into music by Sylvia Zhu.<sup>6</sup> Each gamma-ray photon was scaled down from its original, enormously high, frequency to the audible spectrum, with the rate of arrival of photons also

slowed down to a sensible tempo.

Although the results sound interesting enough, such efforts by members of the scientific community are more likely to have novelty than aesthetic value. But a few professional musicians have got in on the act too. Thomas Dolby, for example, used input from Fiorella Terenzi on his 1994 album *The Gate to the Mind's Eye*, while the reggae band Echo Movement used data from the Kepler space telescope on *Love and the Human Outreach* (2012). And *FT* editor David Sutton drew my attention to extensive work in this area by former Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart.

In 2013, Hart teamed up with cosmologist George Smoot of the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory in California. A few years previously, Smoot had won the Nobel Prize for his work on the cosmic microwave background (CMB) – the oldest radiation in the Universe, which Hart describes as "beat one".<sup>7</sup> The collaboration resulted in a 20-minute audiovisual experience called *Rhythms of the Universe*, first mounted at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC. Taking Smoot's data on the CMB as a starting point, Hart

worked with Lawrence Lab scientists to combine it with other astronomical data – from the Sun, pulsars and distant galaxies – and convert it into something that actually sounds like music (Hart admits he took some artistic liberties with the scientific data to produce the sound he wanted).

Hart made a second foray into astronomical sonification in April 2018, this time for an event called *Musica Universalis* at the Hayden Planetarium in New York. That title – Latin for "Music of the Universe" – is a virtual synonym of Kepler's "Harmony of the World", and Hart seemed to echo Kepler's worldview in an interview he gave at the time:

"Music is vibrations, which are an essential part of life, but are also an essential part of the Universe. We're just a miniature of what's happening in the cosmos... the Universe is one giant instrument played by the forces of nature. And that's what *Musica Universalis* is all about. It's the greatest story ever told."<sup>8</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> David K Love, *Kepler and the Universe*, Prometheus Books, New York, 2015, p. 163

<sup>2</sup> John Rodgers & Willie Ruff, "Kepler's Harmony of the World: A Realization for the Ear", *American Scientist*, May-June 1979, p. 292

<sup>3</sup> Emily Baldwin et al, *Communicating Astronomy with the Public*, issue 19 (March 2016), pp. 33-4

<sup>4</sup> Fiorella Terenzi, "Acoustic Astronomy: The Sounds of the Universe", <http://faculty.fiu.edu/~fterenzi/research/>

<sup>5</sup> Alex Harrison Parker, "Supernova Sonata", [http://www.astro.uvic.ca/~alexhp/new/supernova\\_sonata.html](http://www.astro.uvic.ca/~alexhp/new/supernova_sonata.html)

<sup>6</sup> Julie McEnery, "The Sound of a Fermi Gamma-Ray Burst", [https://blogs.nasa.gov/GLAST/2012/06/21/post\\_1340301006610/](https://blogs.nasa.gov/GLAST/2012/06/21/post_1340301006610/)

<sup>7</sup> Natasha Geiling, "Former Grateful Dead Drummer Mickey Hart Composes Music from the Sounds of the Universe", <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/former-grateful-dead-drummer-mickey-hart-composes-music-from-the-sounds-of-the-universe-265907/>

<sup>8</sup> Sam D'Arcangelo, "Mickey Hart Talks Sounds of the Universe", <https://liveforlivemusic.com/features/mickey-hart-sounds-universe/>

♦ ANDREW MAY is a freelance writer and defence consultant and a regular contributor to *FT*. His latest book is *The Science of Sci-Fi Music* (Springer, 2020).



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## Fresh vistas of paranormal history

It may have a winsome title and an overcooked blurb, says **Jerry Glover**, but this study of the paranormal by a Norwegian author is detailed and thorough

### A Short History of (Nearly) Everything Paranormal

**Our Secret Powers – Telepathy, Clairvoyance & Precognition**

Terje G Simonsen

Watkins Books 2020

Pb, 530pp, £20, ISBN 9781786783578

This “travelogue from the twilight zone” is hyped as “the most in-depth paranormal survey ever made”. If so, the most in-depth paranormal study before this one must have set the standard rather low seeing how the present work is founded on the “Big Five” of parapsychology: telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, telekinesis, and healing (with limited delves into related areas). That is not a criticism of the book itself, which is far better than the expectations I gleaned from the slightly misleading and winsome title, and the overcooked blurb.

The author does not set out to prove these phenomena, only to probe, which he does with humour and a flair for compelling prose (spiced with an inordinate amount of exclamation marks), drawing on an eclectic range of sources. He is true to his word, synthesising concepts while drawing no hard conclusions, and raising questions that advocate against the paranormal claims made by the research he highlights.

Simonsen begins with some of psi’s most tangible results, those from psychic archaeology. I already knew of Richard III and Glastonbury Abbey, but there are other examples that were

new to me – a pattern running through the book. Simonsen cites more highly-educated researchers and “official” studies than any paranormal book I know. It is powerful to find so many scientists and academicians, Nobel prizewinners among them, who have been brave enough to admit the validity of psi phenomena based on rigorous experiments and field studies.

At the root of this journey into centuries of psi is perhaps the greatest mystery of all: consciousness. Noting how psychic investigators once found wireless telegraphy a useful model for psi phenomena, Simonsen proposes the “Mental Internet” as a better analogy for consciousness since the Internet is a medium for storing as well as transmission. This aligns with alternatives to the standard model of consciousness such as the

Irreducible Mind model drawn from the work of Frederic Myers (1843-1901) and William James (1842-1910), and the Orchestrated Objective Reduction (OrchOR) model developed by Stuart Hameroff and Roger Penrose, along with other parallels from Western and East-

ern perspectives. Classic experiments are summarised, and the sceptical perspective even gets a chapter, exposing dishonourable tactics of prominent sceptics and the weaknesses inherent in sceptical dogmas – even Derren Brown’s, alas. No mention is made of higher dimensional Hilbert spaces, another candidate to have been recently proposed by physicists as pathways to psi phenomena. Arthur Koestler,

*At the root of this journey into centuries of psi is the greatest mystery of all: consciousness*

who wrote extensively about parapsychology in *The Roots of Coincidence*, is also omitted.

In 1998 the Sony electronics corporation announced a conclusion following a multi-year research programme: “ESP exists, but that any practical application of this knowledge is not likely in the foreseeable future.” Imagine the potential for psi experiments using networked game consoles and computers, the ordinary Internet fusing with the Mental Internet. Surely there are great prospects in this area, but it will take engineering mavericks, those with the vision to unleash consciousness from linear limitations, to realise them and rescue us from soul-obliterating, dead-end materialist outlooks that undermine the horizons of consciousness. Probably not Sony, then... Elon Musk?

Ethnographer Joseph K Long’s account of what happened in a crowded Jamaican marketplace in 1970 is very possibly the most surreal and nightmarishly-comical mass sighting (or “collective telepathic hallucination”) I have ever read. As a Norwegian, Simonsen offers similarly obscure persons and incidents from his own backyard. There is the Snåsa Man, clairvoyant and healer Joralf Gjerstad, a national treasure; Prof Harald K Schjederup, a pioneer in Norwegian parapsychological literature; Georg Hygen’s work on Vardøger, the “national para-

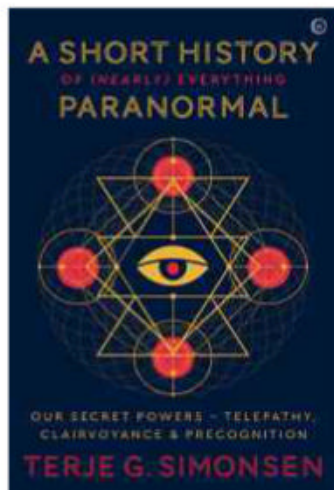
normal phenomenon” of Norway (déjà vu in reverse, not the Christian extreme metal band; see FT327:30-33). Also outlined is the 2010 Lalm kindergarten poltergeist, investigated by psychology professor Kjell Flekkøy.

For those who sigh at the tendency for reports from the English-speaking world to be overly-regurgitated, it is refreshing to find fresh vistas of paranormal history in translation, and I hope this author brings us more from his sphere. We could do with it; it can often seem that many countries without English as their first language are more willing to embrace the paranormal as a fact of everyday life. (The National Museum of Estonia has a small display acknowledging their country’s extensive heritage of UFO investigations.)

There are forays into studies of reincarnation, Rupert Sheldrake’s model of morphic resonance, mesmerism, the Star-gate remote viewing project, precognitive visions, psychokinesis, apophenia, dreams, philosophy, quantum physics, German Romanticism, spoon bending and a little (not enough) on the nature of time. One of the most blatant omissions is the burgeoning field of psychedelic research into ESP, such as that being undertaken by Dr David Luke at the University of Greenwich. Dark matter and dark energy, fundamental mysteries that just may hide secrets of how Reality works at the paranormal level, are another possible blind spot.

At least some of this material will be familiar to the “average fortean” with an ear to the ground. I look forward to a sequel volume, or at least an expanded and updated edition with more translated material.

★★★★★





# A muddy refuge

Finding lost objects opens up the imagination – and rediscovers a typeface

**Mudlarking**  
**Lost and Found on the River Thames**

Lara Maiklem  
Bloomsbury 2020  
Pb, 317pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781408889237

As children, nearly all of us have an instinct for curiosity and collecting. I still have a stone with a hole in it I found on Chesil beach as a three-year-old. I encountered mudlarks in the 1980s: members of the Society of Thames Mudlarks, licensed by the Port of London to metal-detect and explore the Thames foreshore (the area washed over by tides twice daily). Museum of London archaeologists would identify finds in return for recording the area where they were found. Once trust was established, some members would work on archaeology sites. Over time, more people began looking for finds without metal detectors and detectorists became more interested in non-metal finds such as bones, pottery and gemstones. The range of people expanded; more women were seen on the foreshore. One such was Laura Maiklem. Her book is structured around a journey down the tidal stretch of the Thames, from Teddington Lock to the estuary. It retains the association of things and their associated stories with place and environment. Places are evoked, such as the tidal head without river walls, liable to flood and also allowed to drain dramatically once a year, so that you can walk from bank to bank across the (muddy) river bed. Amongst the mobile phones and 19th- and 20th-century beer bottles are clay pipe stems, the detritus of leisure, including the odd round marble stopper from a Codd bottle, which were broken by children to be used as a toy. As we travel down the

Thames, each area's character is evoked, the foreshore related to activities on land nearby; tokens from long-gone inns, for instance, or the Doves Press type. This was a metal letterpress type of the arts and crafts era, based on 15th-century Italian originals, named after a pub on the river bank. Partners in the business fell out and the 500,000 metal type pieces were cast into the river by the founder. In 2010, designer Robert Green managed to retrieve 150 pieces, helping to restore a modern version. The author found the original comma! The recreated digital typeface is



used for running heads and epigraphs through the book. Through many examples, we learn how mudlarking becomes so absorbing to its practitioners. Objects spark imaginative leaps to other times and situations; the river

sculpts and reworks man-made objects. It provides a refuge for people who can leave their ordinary worries behind, and step into other worlds. Similarly, researching the objects opens up vistas to the imagination. Maiklem is sufficiently candid to give us a glimpse of some of her own motivation, without ever falling into self-indulgence. Since mudlarking has become popular, the Port of London has imposed a licensing system so that anyone looking for things on the foreshore needs a license to do so. This book is a delightful evocation of place and former times, as well as associated objects; if you would like to spend time somewhere other than your present reality, I suggest a leisurely stroll through its pages in the company of Laura Maiklem. David Sankey ★★★★★

# Superstition

**A Very Short Introduction**

Stuart Vyse  
Oxford University Press 2020  
Pb, 168pp, £8.99, ISBN 9780198819257

Despite its small format and dull cover, this is a corker of a book for any fortune's bookshelves. In six dense but very readable chapters the author manages to cover most aspects of superstition, from its origins in magic, prophecy and divination, and shows just how pervasive and dangerous its effects have been throughout history.



Superstition was originally bound up with religion and thus taken very seriously, the gods being easily angered and any practice, however illogical, which might avert their rage was avidly taken up. This knowledge, in the hands of elite religious/political establishments such as the Catholic Church, led for instance to the superstitious beliefs about so-called "witches" who were annihilated in their thousands.

With superstition being belief-driven, illogical and fundamentally anti-scientific, one would have thought the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries would have quashed it forever, but Vyse shows that while reason and scientific experimentation were far more successful at explaining the world than was the local wise woman, all that happened was that superstition moved with the times. The advent of scientific thinking brought with it the exact opposite; people chose to ignore what could be demonstrably proved and instead clung to updated versions of old superstitions. Spiritualism took up the baton and dragged anti-scientific belief into the 20th century, where soldiers still believed, or at least hoped, that wearing a particular item of clothing or carrying a charm would ward off bullets. A short catalogue of popular superstitions and their origins such as numbers, dates, the evil eye and so on, is useful but will lead more open-minded thinkers to question whether, for instance, homeopathy or Feng Shui are superstitions. Viewed with a sceptical eye, superstitions can be entertaining and informative

as long as they are not taken too seriously. They certainly tell us a great deal about how we choose to interpret and attempt to influence the world. Vyse concludes by pointing out the irony that one of science's greatest achievements, the Internet, is the largest promoter of superstitious beliefs yet; a digital petri dish in which superstition can arise and spread across the globe unchecked in just a few hours.

An index, extensive references and a solid bibliography all add to this book's usefulness but remember, *cave credendi!* Andy Roberts ★★★★★

# Philip K Dick

**Essays of the Here and Now**

ed. David Sandner  
McFarland 2020  
Pb, 226pp, £44.95, ISBN 9781476677897

When Philip K Dick died in 1982, aged just 53, only *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* remained in print in the USA, its title in small print under the *Blade Runner* logo. Today, PKD is "one of America's most influential writers" and, according to *Time* in 2005, *Ubik* is among the 100 greatest English language novels published since 1923. But PKD's remarkable oeuvre is deeper (he published 44 novels and about 120 short stories) and more insightful than the surface Run-neresque gloss in SF, film, TV, and video games may suggest. For me, Dick is a pre-eminent fortune novelist, given his interest in esoteric religions, occultism and parapsychology, his creation of a menagerie of exotic aliens and his transformative spiritual experience.

On 3 February 1974, PKD experienced a vision of a pink beam of light that provided accurate information about his son's then undiagnosed illness. PKD spent much of the rest of his life trying to understand the event, resulting in the VALIS trilogy – including his masterpiece *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* – and his journal, a selection of which is published as *Exegesis*. Obviously, this was a profoundly personal, subjective event. But several essays in this book offer invaluable insights into its significance for PKD and his work. PKD's exploration of spiritual





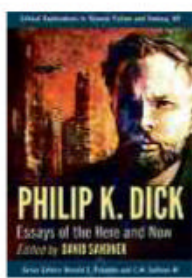
themes followed his early “dystopian” phase, when he focused on political and material issues. During his “ontological” middle stage, PKD discussed the nature of reality and being human in books such as *Do Androids Dream, Ubik* and *A Scanner Darkly*. In his introduction, David Sandner notes that “intense paranoia is the uneasy, palpitating heart” of PKD’s fiction that still “feels frighteningly relevant, here and now.” After all, you don’t need to be a conspiracy nut to worry about technological surveillance, memory manipulation (FT394:40-45) and the political and intellectual influence of search and social media algorithms.

The essays explore these phases as well as PKD’s non-SF novels, which tend to be overlooked despite typically covering the same themes, motifs and concerns. There are some excellent and informative insights into Hollywood’s interpretations. Paul Sammon, who wrote a book on the making of *Blade Runner*, nicely summarises the background to the various incarnations of this seminal film. He notes that Ridley Scott’s movie offers “an amazing echo of so many core phildickian concerns”.

*Here and Now* collects new essays and presentations at a conference held in 2016. The essays are unashamedly academic, the meeting reports less so. Both presume a considerable familiarity with PKD’s work. There’s a strong Southern Californian focus. California State University holds PKD’s manuscripts and other material, hosted the conference, and PKD spent his final decade, which encompassed some of his most productive years, in Orange County. This focus, especially the personal recollections, throws light on PKD as a person as well as an author.

*Here and Now* is an important book about an important writer. It’ll broaden and deepen even an aficionado’s understanding and appreciation of one of the 20th century’s most important and influential writers. After all, Sandner notes, PKD’s stories “challenge us to see reality, maybe for the first time”.

Mark Greener  
★★★★★



## Adventures in Cryptozoology

**Hunting for Yetis, Mongolian Deathworms and Other Not-So-Mythical Monsters**

Richard Freeman

Mango Publishing 2019

Pb, 252pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781642500158

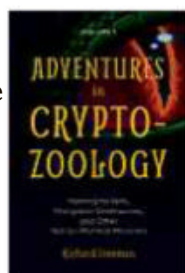
Most *FT* readers will know Richard Freeman of the Centre for Fortean Zoology, a cryptozoologist who puts his money where his mouth is. Where many sit and read books, Freeman visits the locations and interviews the witnesses, and he is a popular speaker at conferences and on podcasts. *Adventures in Cryptozoology* claims to present “the exciting stories of his investigations of (various cryptids)”.

This is part one of a two-volume set. Its six chapters cover, without illustrations, dragons, lake monsters, sea monsters, giant apes, a history of cryptozoology and the magic zoo. Each of these could easily be extended to multiple volumes, so this book can’t cover each area in depth. But even as an introduction to each group there are bound to be beasts or sightings that are new to the majority of readers. And that’s where the beauty of this book lies: new cryptozoology reports. The sheer depth of material covered in its pages is amazing, with Freeman’s thoughts on many cases and details of eye-witness reports taken from a range of publications. Unfortunately, the lack of references does make it difficult to then read up further on these specific cases.

I will admit to a slight disappointment, as the back cover promises more on Freeman’s own investigations. It’s true the work is based on material that he has researched, but knowing some of the expeditions he has been involved in I was expecting more of a personal tale. Apparently, this is to come in volume two.

Some of Freeman’s previous books have been published by CFZ Press, a publisher crying out for a proof reader. This book still has enough typos to be noticeable, but thankfully not to the level of the CFZ tomes.

Overall, it’s a good book, full of some of Freeman’s favourite crypt-



tids and some of the background associated with them. I wholeheartedly look forward to the second volume and the chance to read about Freeman’s boots-on-the-ground investigations.

Gordon Rutter

★★★★

## Old Thiess, a Livonian Werewolf

**A Classic Case in Comparative Perspective**

Carlo Ginzburg & Bruce Lincoln

University of Chicago Press 2020

Pb, 289pp, £20, ISBN 9780226674414

In the second half of the 16th century a story circulated in Germany about a Baltic peasant who, after having wine and dined, fell into a stupor. The following morning a dead horse was found in the field in front of the inn, cut to pieces with a scythe. The peasant confessed his guilt. He had been chasing a witch who was flying around him like a little flame and he had tried to hit her with the scythe but he had instead hit a horse that was in the way. The man who reported this episode remarked that the peasant could not have killed the horse and had only dreamt it; he had been asleep the whole night in the tavern and could not have been in the field at the same time. The Devil had made him dream it, but the peasant was so convinced of his experience that he confessed to it. As a result he was burned at the stake.

This old tale still intrigues scholars today. One reason is that the peasant divulged why he had been chasing a witch: he was a “werewolf” and thus an enemy of witches. According to Prof Carlo Ginzburg, a similar story emerged at the end of the 17th century during the trial against another Livonian, an old man called Thiess. (Livonia was the name of parts of current Estonia and Latvia). Thiess, too, had been a “werewolf” fighting witches, only he never said that he had been asleep, drunk, or in a trance. (“Werewolf” is the translation of a very local term with hardly any resemblance to the werewolves in the rest of Europe). The little ritual of becoming a “werewolf” was the only tenuous link to alcohol; if someone toasted you and you toasted back, you became a “werewolf”;

then you had to fight the witches every year. This toast is documented throughout the 17th century, but werewolves in a state of trance are not. Yet Ginzburg found the trance fascinating because it allowed him to relate it to the Benandanti of north-eastern Italy, who also fought witches in a state of trance. Similar fighters included the Balkan *kresniki* and the Ossetian *burdkudzäutä*. In his study *Ecstasies* (1990), Ginzburg thought these people could be seen as the descendants of shamans because of their trance. In the current book the parts of *Ecstasies* pertaining to the Livonian werewolf are republished, together with fragments from Ginzburg’s previous book *The Night Battles*, as well as articles he wrote between these two books.

The missing trance in the Thiess case may be an insignificant detail, but the problem is that in the Baltic context an experience of trance is the exception and the peasant may simply have been drunk. In the west European context the soul-journey of werewolves is only documented rarely and their fighting witches not at all. Generally, men transformed into wolves by putting on a wolf’s skin. After the 13th century there is no sign of werewolves in a state of trance. Ginzburg’s argument is thus dependent on a particular perspective, and from my point of view it is full of holes. It certainly does not help to fully understand a local Baltic case at the end of the 17th century.

Prof Lincoln has collected all of Ginzburg’s fragments on the Livonian werewolf; he has also incorporated his own publications on Thiess, a translation (from German into English) of the original trial transcript, and other writings including two discussions between Ginzburg and Lincoln. Studies by other scholars are only listed in “Suggestions for Further Reading”; these exhibit a less comparative approach and attempt an understanding of the Thiess case from a more local perspective. It would be good if the University of Chicago Press republished them, too.

Willem de Blécourt

★★





# Classical dreaming

Barry Baldwin explores a new translation of a famous Greek work and a companion commentary on it

## The Interpretation of Dreams

Artemidorus, ed. Peter Thonemann & Martin Hammond

Oxford University Press 2020  
Pb, 416pp, £10.99, ISBN 9780198797951

## An Ancient Dream Manual

Artemidorus' The Interpretation of Dreams

Peter Thonemann

Oxford University Press 2020  
Hb, 256pp, £20, ISBN 9780198843825

Artemidorus's work from the second century AD is the only survivor of many such "Dreams for Dummies" compilations, which go back to the fifth century BC. He naturally considers his the best.

Thonemann and Hammond provide a richly annotated translation of Artemidorus, with Thonemann's separate book backgrounding this Græco-Roman dream merchant, his clients, and their world.

Stressing the practical, with several hundred case histories, Artemidorus was aiming at punters rather than professors – "People who go to fortune-tellers are functioning conservatives" (Fort, *Books*, p668).

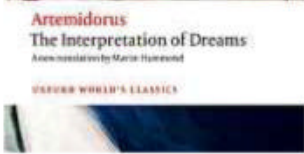
Given the number of athletes' dreams, Thonemann suggests Artemidorus might have set up a stall at Olympia to flog his book. Granting this, Dream Books may have been sold at other focused locations. Dentists, perhaps; Thonemann remarks on the plethora of orthodontic dreams – Moments of Tooth...?

Also notable is the number of bird dreams, perhaps connected with Artemidorus's lost book on ornithoscopy.

Derided by older-generation classicists, Artemidorus made a 20th-century comeback, thanks to Jung ("The peak of scientific dream exegesis") and especially

Freud. The Viennese trick-cyclist hails him as true founder, shares his pre-occupation with puns and word play, and agrees that dreams are products of "daytime residue": ancient explanations ranged from heaven-sent (Homer; but Aristotle thought this "ridiculous") to Epicurean notions of random atoms assaulting minds made vulnerable by sleep). One vital distinction. Freud concentrated on explaining the past; Artemidorus interpreted for the future.

Michel Foucault (*The History of Sexuality*, vol. 3, subject of Thonemann's chapter 5) applauds Artemidorus's view that sex is largely a class-based phallic issue:



who penetrates whom? There's lashings of what Hammond and Thonemann dub "mind-boggling sex" – some call it an ancient *Kinsey Report*. His erotic panoply runs to such distinctive feats as auto-fellatio (surely only for acrobats

and gymnasts) and more sedate oral activities.

Another dream is of being naked in public. Fort (p686) regards this as "disagreeable". His frequent oneiric remarks may be influenced by his dream-obsessed friend, Theodore Dreiser.

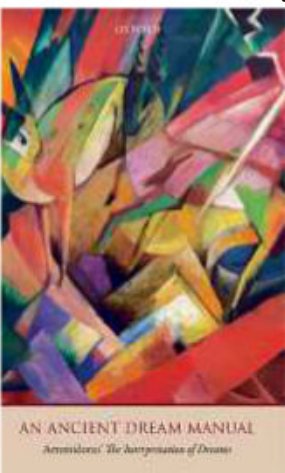
Hammond and Thonemann contrast Brian Masters' *Dreams about HM the Queen* (1972) with the Roman emperor's absence from Artemidorus. They rightly emphasise his focus on everyday life, such as children playing in streets alongside ranting madmen, dung-heaps, brothels and street conjurers doing the three-ball and cup trick.

Slave dreams predominate. They may well have been eager Dream Book buyers. The universal favourite is the one

who saw himself grow three cocks. Explanation: he would be freed and so earn the right to triple Roman nomenclature.

This is not the first English translation of Artemidorus – Thonemann traces that story from 1559; others run from Arabic to Welsh. There was RJ White (1975) and Daniel Harris-McCoy (2012), praised by Thonemann (*TLS* 2013) who here changes tack and condemns its "unreliable translations".

This complementary pair of books naturally overlap on Artemidorus's life and background and Dream Book history. Both provide very select bibliographies and Brobdingnagian indexes (61 pages, compared to White's eight). A useful appendix on Greek numerals/numerology is appended. The translations naturally often vary little from previous ones, except when they depart from Roger Pack's canonical Teubner Greek text; there's a list of variant readings. The richly-annotated translations



are balanced and enriched by Thonemann's 11 chapters lucidly, sometimes wittily, exploring all aspects of Artemidorus and his twin worlds of dreams and reality.

A caveat: William Harris in *Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity* (2009) dismissed Artemidorus as "a man of monumental gullibility" who made up these dreams, rendering them useless as a sociological treasure-house. If true, all bets are off. However, Harris has lost the ensuing academic dog-fight.

"An undistorted interpretation of external sounds in the mind of a dreamer could not continue to exist in a dreaming mind because that touch of relative realism would be of awakening and not of dreaming" (Fort p22).

Interpretation ★★★★★  
Dream Manual ★★★★★

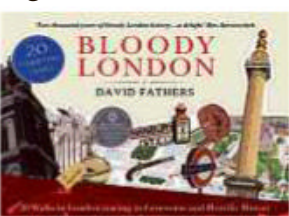
## Bloody London

20 Walks in London, Taking in its Gruesome and Horrific History

David Fathers

Bloomsbury 2020  
Pb, 128pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781844865505

This book should be a treat for London types with an interest in strange and gruesome tales and criminal history. It lays out a series of illustrated strolls, some linked by geography and some (fire, imprisonment and plague) by theme. Using a loose definition of gruesome, horrific and criminal, the author pulls together a collection of facts to



follow along walks of between one and 10 kilo-

metres. The tales featured are diverse, from events of historical import to one-off murders; the latter are likely to provide fresh information even for those with an informed view of London history. The layout follows the pattern set in Fathers's last work, *London's Hidden Rivers*, combining illustration and maps to follow, with the story spots flagged up.

The first route (Holloway and Islington) is a promising start, but the book structure, which worked so well in the previous book, falls down here, as the pages feel cramped and points are overstretched to make the walks work. The book feels rushed and unfocused, though it can still be a pleasure despite these shortcomings. Fathers has unearthed an interesting collection of London's lesser known gruesome tales.

I say London, but it feels disappointingly retro in 2020 for a book about "London" to treat south London as a sort of smear below the Thames, as this does. A book on horrific, criminal or gruesome London that, for example, fails to include a walk from Peckham via Camberwell and Walworth to the Elephant just isn't doing its job. This may be a provincial point to make, but it underscores a broader criticism of the work. Having said this I look forward to Fathers's future work because he has a lively mind, an eclectic approach and clearly knows his (north) London.

Chris Roberts  
★★★



# Everybody's IN A LATHER

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## Carry On Kung Fu Exorcist

In 1985, Ricky Lau's hopping vampire movie was a seminal moment in Hong Kong cinema, deftly blending Western cinematographic techniques with Chinese myths to create a popular classic



### Mr Vampire

Dir Ricky Lau, Hong Kong 1985  
Eureka, £19.99 (Blu-ray)

In the early 1970s, most of the Chinese language films seen in the West were kung-fu action stories, with an occasional *wu xia* epic and very few outright fantasies. Between *Zu Warriors* (1983) and *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987) the filmic exploration of supernatural fiction suffered quite a dearth; surprising, really, considering the significant profile of such stories in Chinese literature.

One anthology of supernatural tales — the *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, otherwise known as *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* — has been regularly plundered and adapted for modern Chinese audiences since it was compiled in the 17th century. While its principal stories enshrine archaic myths and beliefs about spirits, magic and the transmigration of souls, it contains no bloodthirsty vampires as the West imagines them. Instead, its dominant trope is the sad fate of female spirits

### Ricky Lau's film is rooted in the magical rituals of 'street' Daoism

— sometimes humans wronged in love or life, sometimes evil or lovelorn fox or tree spirits — who waylay men and drain them of their life force. In their case it is *chi* — the essence of life energy — not blood they are after.

Where other directors aligned their work with highbrow historical literature, Ricky Lau's direction of *Mr Vampire* is entirely rooted in the magical rituals of 'street' Daoism practised daily by most of his ordinary cinema-going audiences. His 'vampires', while more Western, were still hungry for *chi* instead of blood, and, to the bewilderment of the western audiences, they hopped! (Hopping ghosts are an ancient type throughout the Far East)

The story concerns a rich family who commission a professional exorcist to reburial an ancestor and

ward off ensuing bad luck. During the exhumation, it is discovered that the previous burial was incompetent and has turned the ancestor into a 'vampire lord'. A classic farce ensues as the Daoist exorcist and his inept team subdue the increasing number of vampires. Adding to the mayhem, the young men compete for the family's pretty but naive daughter, while an inadvertently awakened fox spirit lustfully pursues one of the assistants.

It had all the ingredients of an exotic Whitehall farce — think 'Carry On Kung Fu Exorcist' — but the way the plots interconnected while spiralling chaotically out of control delighted the homegrown audience. Farce works best with character stereotypes, as this film demonstrates. It is Lam Ching-Ying who is most memorable; despite his expertise in martial arts and stunt work, he reveals a surprising talent for comedy. His po-faced magician 'Master Gau' is the perfect straight man for his hapless assistants and their knockabout antics. A close second is Ricky Hui's simple-minded and

well-intentioned but bumbling assistant 'Man Choi', to me a sort of Chinese incarnation of Norman Wisdom.

During this period, the West began taking an interest in kung-fu movies, while at the same time Hong Kong cinema was incorporating more Western themes and techniques into its home-grown productions. This is nowhere better demonstrated than the scene in *Mr Vampire* in which 'Master Gau' and his team go to a 'foreign' coffee shop for the first time and are baffled by the Western etiquette of drinking coffee with milk and sugar. In effect, it dramatised, in a fascinating way, both Chinese curiosity about everyday Western manners and the way these were being assimilated into their own everyday culture.

More importantly, *Mr Vampire* had the audacity to make fun of 'street' Daoism and its rituals, so important to the daily life of the Chinese. When Steve Moore and I first saw the film (in some Wardour Street preview room) we were surprised (joyfully) by the gentle mockery of the yellow paper talismans, the spasmodic finger gestures and daft joss-stick lore (beware of the 'one long, two short' configuration).

With *Mr Vampire*, Ricky Lau created a franchise that spawned four sequels between 1986 and 1992. In each, Lau directed and Lam Ching-Ying reprised 'Master Gau', his magisterial, mono-browed, Daoist magician. Indeed, Lam seems to have created a stereotype that Chinese audiences quickly embraced; so much so that his overly serious and self-promoting exorcist was shamelessly expropriated by other, later films.

This remaster of a seminal and still hugely enjoyable classic is extremely welcome.

Bob Rickard







## Mortal

**Dir André Øvredal, Norway 2020**  
**Signature Entertainment, £7.99 (DVD)**

Ten years ago director André Øvredal made the well-received *Trollhunter*, which combined Norse mythology with a mainstream Hollywood sensibility and created a dark fantasy tale which, while not entirely serious, built up quite an atmosphere of terror. With his new film, *Mortal*, he has achieved much the same, although in this case he has combined mythology with superheroes rather than monsters.

Eric (Nat Wolff) is a young Norwegian-American who is on the run in Norway, having been involved in a house fire in which several of his relatives were killed. Venturing into a small town to resupply, he is goaded by some teenage punks, a confrontation that ends with one of them dead. Eventually tracked down by the local police, Eric refuses to talk to anyone except Christine (Iben Akerlie), the psychiatrist assigned to his case. To her, he demonstrates his power over the elements, nearly demolishing the police station in the process, and she tries to help him discover where it comes from and who he really is.

Anyone with even a passing interest in superheroes will be able to tell from that plot summary exactly who he is, and it is fair to say that as a result the film holds few surprises for those at whom it is aimed. There are some effective scenes which reveal the strength and scope of Eric's power – notably a helicopter crash – but the surrounding story is weak. This is essentially a superhero origin story and therefore is pretty broad brush.

Wolff tries hard, but these moody teenager roles are hard to carry off; if you're not careful, the main character can end up coming across like a self-obsessed pillock. He broods sufficiently, but the emotional stuff is more challenging – which is probably why the central relationship, with Christine, does not convince. When she is first introduced, she is an insecure professional woman; by the end she seems to have reverted to nothing more than a plot device.

If you love your superheroes and fancy something slightly less overwhelming than blockbuster Marvel or DC product, then you might enjoy this – the locations are stunning, if nothing else, and there are a couple of good supporting performances – but *Mortal* is hard to recommend to any but aficionados.

**Daniel King**



## Carmilla

**Dir Emily Harris, UK 2019**  
**On general release from 16 Oct, and on digital platforms from 19 Oct**

Before there was Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, there was Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*. The similarities between certain characters and expressions of vampiric behaviour in the two stories suggest that the 1872 novel had a distinct impact on the immortal 1897 classic, and both were instrumental in cementing vampirism as not merely superstitious folklore, but also a mainstream horror entertainment staple.

While perhaps not as well-known to the casual consumer of vampiric entertainment, *Carmilla* has nonetheless left her fang marks on plenty of media, be it books, comics or films, and the appeal of Le Fanu's story is obvious. Containing the ever-present sexual symbolism that gives vampire fiction its primal appeal, *Carmilla* of course has an extra layer due to the lesbian nature of the titular vampire and the seduction of her victims.

Much as there are many types of vampires throughout popular culture, there are just as many ways to interpret the genre on film. Where Hammer horror has had plenty of vampire offerings – including several features either faithfully adapting or being more loosely based on *Carmilla* – subtle takes on the genre tend to be rarer in contemporary cinema, but they are certainly just as valid as their conventionally gory counterparts.

Some would even argue that such low-key vampire tales are more unsettling, and Emily Harris's *Carmilla* indeed has a consistently disturbing undercurrent from start to

finish. Here, the characteristics of vampirism take a backseat to a narrative focused on telling a love story involving two women during a time in history where lesbian love was a forbidden expression of sexuality.

Lead actress Hannah Rae embodies the type of innocence and naïveté you would expect from the character of Lara, who falls prey to Carmilla's seduction. Similarly, as her counterpart, Devrim Lingnau's portrayal of Carmilla is also compelling, as the actress imbues the female vampire with an intensity that is both alluring and eerie. The old adage that opposites attract is put to good use, as Carmilla shifts from being a romantic tale of forbidden love – one which feels tender rather than exploitative – to a narrative concerned with a predator toying with its prey.

However, by all but stripping the story of its supernatural qualities in favour of an ambiguity about the incidents that take place around, and eventually in, Lara's household, the reality of what is going on almost becomes too vague at times. As such, some of the subtle horror of the narrative is lost in the translation from script to film, especially since the eventual pay-off to all the build-up is too sparse, leaving the narrative somewhat flat at times as a result.

An atmospheric piece that chooses to suggest rather than explicitly spell out what is going on, *Carmilla* will appeal to those who prefer their gothic vampire horror to be sensual and subtle rather than gory and explicit. For mainstream horror fans, Harris's adaptation of the story may be too spartan for a full-blooded expression of vampiric horror, even if it does, at least for most of its running time, possess plenty of narrative bite.

**Leyla Mikkelsen**



## Mara

**Dir Clive Tonge, US 2018**  
**Signature Entertainment, £5.99 (DVD)**

In recent years, horror has suffered massively from the belief that long-legged, bendy-armed, croaking, creaking

demons are terrifically scary. The 'Wan-iverse' of *The Conjuring/Annabelle/The Nun* has made these incredibly bankable, and the trend has damaged other properties which have absolutely no need for them (witness the cheap, tacky demons that spoiled the rich atmosphere of Mike Flanagan's adaptation of *The Haunting of Hill House*). All this to say that *Mara*, centring on a long-legged, bendy-armed, croaky, creaky demon, is never going to be on my Top Ten list.

Rather than taking inspiration from the rich mythology of the Buddhist legend, writer Jonathan Frank's *Mara* is a demon that haunts those suffering from sleep paralysis: in other words, it's just a cool-sounding name. It could just as easily be called Susan.

Actually, the name that will doubtless be on your lips throughout is Freddy. The film-makers do cover themselves by referring directly to Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, but this doesn't alter the fact that dream demons have been done much better elsewhere.

Olga Kurylenko plays Dr Fuller, a psychologist who becomes haunted by Mara after she is brought in to assess the mental state of a woman who claims that the demon killed her husband. Kurylenko is a solid lead, and there is a nicely animated performance from Craig Conway as Dougie, also on Mara's watch list and so avoiding sleep and going completely loopy.

Overall the film is competent, which might be damning with faint praise, but frankly it doesn't deserve more. It's not just the fact that Freddy Krueger has a monopoly on dream demonism, but also the 'marked for death' angle is well-worn and has been exercised by much scarier demons (right back to *Casting the Runes*).

The most memorable aspect of the film is its location, the beautiful city of Savannah, Georgia, which, with its avenues and riverboats, gives the film's look a distinctiveness its narrative lacks.

**Martin Parsons**





# THE HAUNTED GENERATION

BOB FISCHER ROUNDS UP THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PARALLEL WORLDS OF POPULAR HAUNTOLOGY...

"I must have been about six or seven, and I woke up one morning and went downstairs into the family kitchen," remembers Jim Jupp. "And there was a tiny footprint on the table, about an inch long. That made a huge impression on me. 'Right, these things they've been telling me about, fairies and the tooth fairy... they're real!'"

Jim, recording as Belbury Poly, is discussing the childhood memories that have partly inspired his new fairy-themed album, *The Gone Away*. Rather than the floaty, friendly Tinker Bells of children's literature, it celebrates the dark, malevolent beings of traditional folklore and takes musical influence from the affecting 1970s work of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, combining swathes of analogue synth with a distinctly baroque, mediæval feel.

"Those odd memories, even though you rationalise them later, stay with you and haunt you," he adds. He also reveals that the recent Fairy Census of contemporary encounters with the fey folk, compiled by *FT*'s own Simon Young (see **FT321:25, 362:30-37**), played a large part in his research for the album. "There's one that sticks in my mind," he recalls, "Where a family are walking along a path and are suddenly buzzed by a small, flying cube..."

This sense of altered perception, of hallucinatory experiences in the deepest realms of the British countryside, is captured perfectly on a darkly melodic album that, appropriately, includes a quote from avowed fairy enthusiast Arthur Machen on the sleeve. It's available from [ghostbox.co.uk](http://ghostbox.co.uk).

Also lost in the countryside is Gilroy Mere, whose affecting album *Adlestrop* explores the psychogeographical imprint left by decommissioned railway lines and stations. Taking its title from the haunting 1917



poem by Edward Thomas, the album is both melancholy and elegant, summoning plaintive ghosts of the golden age of steam. "Visiting Adlestrop spurred me to get hold of a copy of the Beeching Report," says Mere, aka multi-instrumentalist Oliver Cherer. "It lists all the stations recommended for closure in the 1960s. There are 2,000 wonderful names, like Black Dog Halt and Star Crossing – irresistible to the seasoned hauntologist! I made field recordings in as many locations as I could, using them as the starting point for each track."

Woozy electronica, gently plucked guitars and Cherer's own ghostly vocals effortlessly evoke the windswept remains of abandoned platforms and hidden sidings. Head to [www.claypipemusic.co.uk](http://www.claypipemusic.co.uk) to snap

up a second pressing of the in-demand vinyl, and, indeed, accompanying EP *Over The Tracks*, which has also been reissued. Both have cut-out model stations (Adlestrop itself, and St Leonard's West Marina, in Cherer's native Sussex) to assemble while you listen, although be careful with the scissors and ask a grown-up if you need any help.

Meanwhile, Lancashire's Mark Burford – in his guise as Field Lines Cartographer – is heading further afield. His immersive new album *The Spectral Isle* is inspired by stories of Hy Brasil, the mythical Irish island reputedly populated by both giant rabbits and a powerful wizard. "It appeared on maps for hundreds of years, right up until what you could call relatively recently – the mid-19th century," explains Burford. "This idea of parts of the world still being uncharted and elusive is really appealing. We've shrunk the modern world, but the sense of finding something undiscovered taps deep into the human psyche. It's both scary and seductive." This languidly beautiful ambient album depicts both

a treacherous sea voyage and the magical exploration of this miniature Atlantis, and is available in September from [www.castlesinspace.com](http://www.castlesinspace.com).

And Preston's prolific Stephen James Buckley – recording as Polypores – has also been exploring a few aquatic fantasies. "I imagined this to be the music that the sunken stone heads from Easter Island would have on their record players," says Buckley of his new album *Azure*, where tides of modular synth accompany Polynesian chants and rhythms to bring to life an otherworldly tropical paradise. "I searched for a lot of imagery of sunken cities. And all the different theories about Atlantis, and the various places where it could be located."

The album is available alongside a vinyl reissue of 2019's similarly immersive *Flora*, where dense thickets of soothing ambient sound illustrate Buckley's imaginings of an alien world filled with oversized vegetation. Both albums are released by [www.castlesinspace.com](http://www.castlesinspace.com), and the prolific Buckley has also recorded *Terrain*, a new work inspired by the sprawling worlds of his favourite 1990s console games, *Earthbound* and *Zelda: A Link To The Past*. "A lot of my music is inspired by a particular environment," he says. "With *Terrain*, that environment was one that was generated by pixels and mathematics." It's available in September from [frequencydomain.bandcamp.com](http://frequencydomain.bandcamp.com), and should delight electronica fans and veteran joystick-wagglers alike.

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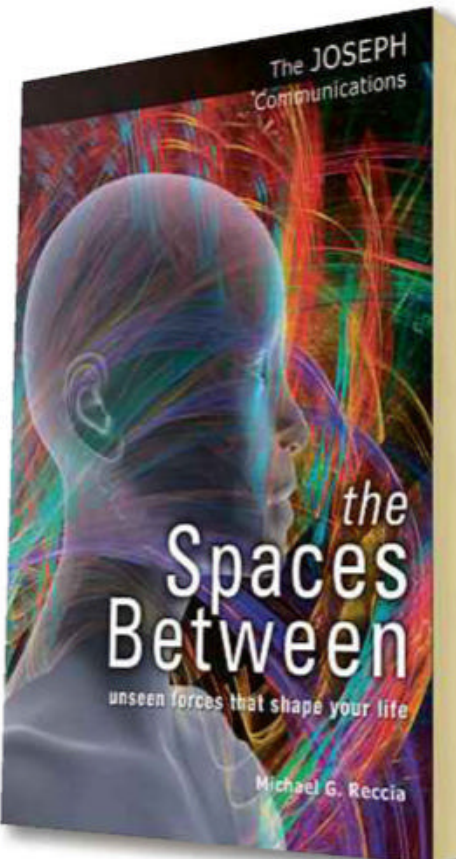
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# LETTERS

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## Heartening

Thank you for making my life more joyful month after month. I can't tell you how important to me the *Fortean Times* is.

**Kevin Hope**

*By email*

## Bells and bleach

Regarding Matt Salusbury's Forum article on sunken bells [FT396:54-55], there is more to the bells of Aberdyfi (Aberdovey) than just a folk song. There is a legend of Welsh folklore that refers to a place known as Cantre'r Gwaelod (The Lowland Hundred). This is an allegedly lost kingdom, sometimes referred to as the Welsh Atlantis, located in the Dyfi Estuary. The story goes that the kingdom was protected by a gated causeway, but that a drunken prince neglected to close said gates at high tide, thus destroying the whole realm. The bells of Aberdyfi are actually supposed to be the bells of the church of Cantre'r Gwaelod and, just as they rung as the kingdom flooded, so they can now be heard in times of crisis.

The myth does have some root in reality (sort of literally). You see, on the opposite bank of the Dyfi Estuary from Aberdyfi is a village called Ynyslas. At low tide, at the edge of the sand dunes, you can find the petrified stumps of trees, remnants of a sunken forest. These remains extend along the coast, south, to the town of Borth. A fascinating story, it was featured on an episode of the BBC's *Coast* series, with Neil Oliver. I have been visiting the Dyfi Estuary for over 30 years.

- There seems to be some confusion among your contributors as to what Trump actually said about bleach. One writer reported that he said that people should inject it, another that we should drink it.

Neither is [strictly] true. The actual remark followed a question, posed after a presentation by William N Bryan, acting undersecretary for science and technology at the US Department for Homeland Security,



## To wit to woo

Isn't it funny how people go on about owls and you start seeing them everywhere?

**Tony Sandy** *By email*

who asked if it was possible to make a disinfectant that could be put into the lungs.

Trump's actually said: "And then I see the disinfectant, where it knocks it out in a minute. One minute. And is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside or almost a cleaning? Because you see it gets in the lungs and it does a tremendous number on the lungs. So it would be interesting to check that. So, that, you're going to have to use medical doctors with. But it sounds — it sounds interesting to me."

**John Wilding**

*East Yorkshire*

## Folks do say

The article concerning sunken church bells [FT396:54-55]

reminded me of a comment by Hilary Mantell in the documentary 'Return To Wolf Hall'. She was recounting a Derbyshire legend of a submerged church: "Each individual acting in perfect good faith and yet passing on an accumulative untruth."

**Oliver Tate**

*Brighton, East Sussex*

## Bank of England notes

Perhaps I can add to Mat Coward's piece in Mythconceptions [FT396:23] by referring to AP Herbert's "Misleading Case" "Who Deceives Whom?" (*More Uncommon Law*, 1982, pp.155-159). This argues, in effect, that you cannot counterfeit a Bank of England note because it is

already a counterfeit; it is a promissory note for which, if you try to enforce the promise, you will receive another promissory note. In other words, if you presented a fake one pound note or a genuine one (this was some time ago), in both cases "you would be sent away poundless" – or at least, with just another note. I would not, however, advise forgers to rely on this. I would also point out that the Bank of England is not obliged to exchange one note for another. You can legally insist that they pay you "on demand" in coin of the realm; so if you feel the need of 500 pennies or 50 10-pence pieces, you know how to go about it.

**Martin Jenkins**

*London*

## Comments

- Here's a conspiracy theory that I hadn't heard before. In classic style, it was passed on to me by a madman down the pub. Apparently, there is a symbol on the £20 note that resembles Covid-19. This is there to spook people, to flaunt manufactured doom in their faces, because Covid-19 is, of course, man-made, not a product of evolution. I pointed out that what was described was in fact a geometrical design, there to dissuade banknote fraudsters, and we were hauled apart to keep the peace.

- Regarding the Flat Earth, I remember from some years ago there was a Christian broadcaster before TBN UK called Revelation TV, which used to run a Creationist animation that included the voiceover "And the Sun and the Moon circled the Earth".

- The Mandela Effect puts me in mind of the similar social phenomenon of 'ghosting', where events or even one's entire existence become erased or inaccessible in the minds of ex-friends, acquaintances etc.

- Finally, regarding the article on HP Lovecraft in Brooklyn: there is now a song "Lovecraft in Brooklyn" by the band "The Mountain Goats", on their *Heretic Pride* album.

**James Wright**

*Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex*



## HP Lovecraft

'The Horror at Clinton Street' feature contains three photographs of Lovecraft's address. "169 Clinton Street in 1925" [FT396:36] and "The same address... as it looks today" [FT396:39] – are indubitably the same building; but in the third picture (p39) – "Lovecraft outside 169 Clinton Street in 1925/6" – the building in the background, although superficially similar, is clearly different. In fact, Google Streetview shows it is the building on the opposite corner of the intersection to 169, apparently 184 Clinton Street. So the caption is technically correct: Lovecraft is 'outside' 169, but facing towards it – the building behind him is not 169.

**Roger J Morgan**

*By email*

Lovecraft's xenophobia in Brooklyn uncannily echoes the Third Satire of Juvenal, in which an embittered native Italian, Umbricius, inveighs against immigration:

*I cannot bear a Rome of  
Greeks, Quirites:*

*And yet, what portion of our  
scum are Greeks ?*

*Syrian Orontes has long  
flushed*

*Its load into the Tiber...*  
(lines 60-62)

**Richard George**

*St Albans, Hertfordshire*

Re: the Lovecraft feature [FT396:36-41], I was reminded of the following letter I came across in an old issue of *Thrilling Wonder Stories* (Feb 1948):

"Dear Sir: In the October issue of 'Thrilling Wonder Stories' I was intrigued by a letter from B. De Revere, in which he (or she?) mentioned liking H.P. Lovecraft's horror tales. As my husband and I knew H.P.L. personally, (he lived in Providence all his life) I want publically [to] thank B. De Revere for all the nice things



said re: Lovecraft.

"If you, dear editor, had known the man as we did... of his passionate love for cats, his dislike of all fish, and his hatred of daylight, you perhaps would realize that anything he wrote in the 'weird' or fantastic line, he really 'lived'... and I use the word 'live' advisedly... even when he lay dying in the hospital, he asked the nurse for a pencil and paper and vividly recorded (for the doctor's benefit) exactly how he felt while dying.

"Lovecraft was a tall, spare man. His skin was the colour of tallow. His handclasp was firm but his hands were always ice-cold. He despised sunshine, and adored utter darkness. He wrote his best horror tales after midnight. His favourite food was sweet chocolate... he consumed pounds of it, and cheese and fruit. He loved coffee smothered with sugar... as strong as love and as black as sin!

"Lovecraft's marriage was short-lived and his divorce was conducted quietly and without press notices. We sympa-

thized with him in his every mood, because we knew him intimately and well – we often visit his unmarked grave in beautiful Swan Point cemetery in Providence, where a huge shaft in the center of the burial plot proclaims that his parents sleep there. His grave was somewhat sunken, last time we visited it, and covered with creeping green myrtle vines. His very spirit seemed hovering over his grave as we stood there in silent prayer for a man whose genius shall ever live, after his bones have crumbled into dust.

"During his lifetime, we used to tell him that his stories rivalled those of Edgar Allan Poe. He 'pooh-poohed' the very notion! He considered his work nothing at all, and never displayed any vanity. He simply wrote because he HAD to write... from an inner urge that would not let him sleep. May he rest in peace! — Mrs. Muriel E. Eddy, 125 Pearl Street, Providence, Rhode Island."

**Rian Hughes**

*By email*

## Mask ideology

Recently, in a shop in Glastonbury, I wore a mask, for my own safety, and because the staff asked. Two people and I queued, all in masks. Behold, trouncing no-queue no-mask fancy dress harridan. Stands right in front of my face and shouts. "Do you know that wearing a mask reduces your *life*! Yeah? Your life expectancy, yeah? It drops by more than 60 per cent! Yeah! Cussuv lack of oxygen to your *brain*!" (Mimes my useless brain). I didn't appreciate her spitty opinion. I am sure I've witnessed surgeons, dentists and woodworkers over 40 years of age.

There's a new scrawl on an old Glastonbury wall: "Your fear is real. Viruses don't exist." I don't understand glastafari mask conspiricists. For a decade, it's been wear a mask – defy 'the state'. Avoid profiling, facial mapping, police photographers, etc. And don't inhale the contrails. Mask up for all you are worth, whether riding a bike near pollution, protesting, or at a party. V for vendetta, rebel alliance, whatever the theme, have a mask! Now, suddenly, my retro camo guerrilla face couture is bowing down and cleaning 'the state's' backside with my tongue. I do wish these people would try to be consistent.

**Lucy Brown**

*Pilton, Somerset*

## Lew Cowperthwaite

With the various theories surrounding his vanishing while swimming in 1967, Barry Baldwin may well wonder [FT395:69] what became of Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt. However, I fear the disappearance of Lew Cowperthwaite the previous year is, sadly, not so much of a mystery. Cowperthwaite was born in the Haymarket area of Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1936, emigrating to Australia with his parents and elder brother Thomas in 1950 so his father could take up the position of minister at the newly built Presbyterian church in Ashford, New South Wales. The Cowperthwaite boys became well known for their academic and sporting





prowess, especially Lew, who excelled in football, swimming and rugby.

Lew went on to become a teacher in nearby Armidale and married local girl Marlene Newly. The death of their infant son, Andrew, in 1961 devastated the couple and, by December 1965, Lew's depression resulted in his sacking by the Department of Education, who stated he was "incapable of undertaking his duties". Unfortunately, it's not hard to see how Lew's story ended a few months later – and it certainly didn't involve a Chinese submarine or CIA assassination. If any readers have further information on Lew or the Cowperthwaite family, I'd appreciate it greatly.

**Lorne Grant**

*Falkirk, Stirlingshire*

## Flat-out nonsense

Gordon Rutter, in his delightful potted history of Flat Earth theory [FT393:42-45], made no mention of one definitive argument for the Earth's sphericity: the direct correlation between celestial and geographic latitude. As you move from the geographical North Pole to the Equator, the north celestial pole appears to move down from the zenith to the northern horizon. In theory, this could still be accommodated by a hemispherical Earth. The clincher for globularity is that the onward journey south from the Equator comes with the apparent rising over the horizon of a second celestial pole – the southern one. This latter proof is unassailable, but remained theoretical until Columbus's age. For example, Peter Martyr d'Anghiera, that indefatigable Italian humanist chronicler of Spain's first explorations in the Americas, wrote in his *Ocean Decade* (9. 2), first published in full in 1511, on the voyage thither by Vicente Yáñez and Arias Pinzón in early 1500:

"When by their reckoning they had sailed 300 leagues in the direction of that wind they say that they lost sight of the arctic pole. At the very moment they noticed it set, a wild storm arose with winds, whirlwinds

and seething seas. Yet they continued on their voyage, though in very great danger, always following the same wind, guided by a pole they had now lost from sight, for over 240 leagues. So let those men and the ancients, whether those be philosophers, or poets or cosmographers, discuss whether the equatorial line is habitable or unapproachable. For these maintain that it is inhabited by dense populations, but those ancients write that it is uninhabitable because of the Sun being directly overhead.

"Yet there were some among the ancients who attempted to prove that it was habitable. These sailors on being questioned by me whether they had seen an Antarctic pole say that they have discovered no distinctive star around the southern point like our Arctic star. But they say that they have seen a panorama of stars, different in appearance from ours, and they saw some thick steamy mist on the horizon, which more or less blotted out their view. They maintain that a mound rises in the middle of the Earth – which, until one has gone completely beyond it, stands in the way of seeing the Antarctic pole. But they believe that they have seen constellations of stars which are very different from the stars in our hemisphere." (tr. G Eatough, *Selections from Peter Martyr*, Turnhout: Brepols, 1998, p.99)

Spot on, of course, apart from the curious allusion to the vestigial myth of a 'central mountain'; for more on that, see my recent book *On the Origin of Myths in Catastrophic Experience*, vol.1, available at lulu.com. Still, to round this off, a pedant could grant the Flat Earthers the concession that the Earth is in fact not spherical: it's an oblate spheroid.

**Marinus van der Sluijs**

*Vancouver, Canada*

Re the Flat Earth controversy, it's interesting to note that, while attention is kept largely focused on possible NASA conspiracies, doctored photos and various clever-sounding technical quibbles, everyone seems to be carefully ignoring a simple fact which

would appear to blow the whole thing wide open: the night sky revolves anti-clockwise around Polaris in the north, clockwise around Sigma Octanis in the south, and vertically at the equator, whereas from a flat Earth it would obviously spin the same way whether viewed from Perth, Scotland, or Perth, Australia. Let them get round that one before attempting to replace tried and tested science with a load of half-baked, unsubstantiated assertions.

**Roger Wyld**

*By email*

Martin Jenkins makes some easy assumptions regarding Flat Earthers [FT395:74]: that they all believe that the Earth is somehow special, and that they are unique in pursuing a sense of significance. Not everybody derives their sense of cosmic significance from the size or centrality of the body whose surface they inhabit. Why would they? Most people find their significance from their place among other humans. It's far more likely that Flat Earthers are a product of the intellectual independence engendered by the Internet, a platform that puts all human opinion on a roughly equal footing, as well as threatening people's sense of uniqueness by giving them a sense of being one among billions.

Rather than checking Flat Earth belief against religious or anti-scientific leanings, it might make more sense to check it against class. How many Flat Earthers are of a class used to being talked down to, and having knowledge dictated to them, by other classes and the 'official' systems of education built by them? Perhaps the appeal of being a Flat Earther is simply that of shrugging off all the supports and biases of the ages, and

shouldering the intellectual weight of the world? This might apply to quite a few eccentric beliefs. That this leaves people a little shaky is understandable, and though I don't believe their conclusions, I can't help admiring their ambition and independent spirit.

**Dean Teasdale**

*Gateshead, Tyne and Wear*

## Phenomenal denial

I found Richard George's Forum article on the "roll-off" factor [FT394:57] really interesting. I hadn't heard this term before, but I have often thought about what is behind similar thought processes as I have recognised them both in forteen accounts and on a personal level. It seems people of a certain disposition have to attempt to almost (or completely?) block out what their minds cannot handle. Does this tie in with screen memories?

I am also reminded of that old and much twisted story about 17th century natives not being able to see *HMS Endeavour* off the east coast of Australia during the first voyage of Captain James Cook. The origin of this story apparently lies with the ship's botanist Sir Joseph Banks. Was the ship so alien to the native mind that, by some unknown mental process, it was blocked out? Or were the natives too busy and uninterested to pay any attention?

**John Hope**

*Bournemouth, Dorset*



" Crazy cat lady? I think you'll find every town's got one, love "



## SIMULACRA CORNER



**1.** Duncan Forrester saw this tree man in Lineover Woods, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.

**2.** While identifying fungi in the Swiss Alps last autumn, Jonathan Revett came across this tree face complete with a newly formed “bracket” fungus forming the tongue. “The fungus is Red Banded

Polypore *Fomitopsis pinicola* which is particularly common on dead and dying coniferous trees and was growing in the exact spot to bring this Alpine denizen to life,” he writes.

**3.** Joe Galvin spotted this friendly wooden character at an Iron Age hill fort site near Boxford in Suffolk.



**4.** While walking in Queens Park, Glasgow, Scott Wilson saw this “old man in a tree taking a nap” and commented: “Perhaps he is a sleeping Treant, slumbering until Sauron rises again. I thought it best not to disturb him.”

*Send pictures of spontaneous forms and figures to [sieveking@forteantimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteantimes.com).*





## Robins

I found the article on The Mandela Effect [FT394:32-38] fascinating. I have my own personal example of such an effect and would be intrigued to know if anyone else has had this experience. From my childhood up to my mid-thirties (so the 1970s to mid-Noughties), it was a well known ‘fact’ about the natural world that only male robins had red breasts, while females were brown all over. I would say it was similar to knowing that acorns came from oak trees – a fact about the natural world you learned as a child. It then became a fact that both male and female robins had red breasts, although juveniles of both gender were brown all over. Intriguingly, when I mentioned this to my wife, she was of the firm belief that only the male robin was red and was surprised to find on the Internet that this wasn’t the case. I suppose the most likely explanation is there was a general misunderstanding about this in society, to the extent it was passed to children by parents and teachers. It would be particularly intriguing to know from any naturalists if they remember a time when Christmas card ornithological imagery was purely the preserve of the male of the species.

**Daniel Clay**

*Formby, Merseyside*

Just finished reading Brian J Robb’s interesting article on the Mandela Effect. I have often wondered about the multiverse theory and believe that this is the best explanation for marital disagreements. Often, over the last 12 years of marriage, my wife has insisted she has told me something that I have no recollection of. What else could be the reason for this difference of recall, other than that we sometimes operate in different universes. Only for our paths to randomly intersect every now and then...

**Nathan Price**

*By email*

## Drone mystery

I am a paranormal investigator in Sacramento, California. On 17 July 2020, I received a strange call from Manchester, New

## Horned beast

I am an antiques dealer and a reader of FT since the mid-1980s. I recently bought half a dozen antique Japanese wood block prints of around 1900-1905 in date (the sort of thing I often buy). Four of them are very typical scenes of samurai (or actors dressed as samurai); the fifth is an image of a naval incident from the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05. It shows a Japanese soldier dressed in cold-weather gear, again presumably from the 1904-05 war – that war was primarily naval, with the only land-based action the Japanese invasion of Sakhalin Island towards the end of the conflict; this image should be from that specific action.

Behind the soldier are two animals – one is clearly a wolf (probably a Hokkaido wolf, also endemic to Sakhalin and extinct since the mid-20th century). The other creature resembles an elasmotherium; what on Earth is an elasmotherium (extinct for probably 30,000 years) doing here, in about 1905? Was it a product of a Japanese artist with an interest in palaeontology? The image shows the horn higher up the creature’s forehead that it would be in real life, which I believe is how these used to be



depicted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – but why is its coat white? I can find no reference to white coats on these creatures – all depictions show them with brown.

Is the artist showing animals he believed were native to Sakhalin – or was it based on an eyewitness account? From what I can learn, elasmotherium were indigenous to a wide tract of eastern Russia and Asia, but their presence in Sakhalin wasn’t confirmed until the mid-20th century. I know quite a bit about Japanese woodblock prints, and the way this is depicted is in a

very everyday sort of way, which is an unusual way to depict a Japanese unicorn (or other legendary beast), as military prints tend to be very factual.

Lastly, can anyone read the Japanese script on the picture? This whole thing reminds of the ‘Monster of Troy’ vase!

**Brian Mulcahy**

*By email*

Dr Karl Shuker comments:

I don’t think the horned creature depicted is a modern-day elasmotherium – it is generally supposed that this officially long-extinct rhino’s horn was much longer and far sturdier than that of the creature illustrated. It is more likely to be a Japanese unicorn, of which there are many morphological variations in traditional Japanese mythology and depictions. Fossil evidence shows that elasmotherium did occur in Siberia, and while Sakhalin Island is situated just off the Pacific coast of the Russian Far East, there is no evidence elasmotherium once existed there.

A Japanese correspondent of mine said that the script style is very difficult to read, but that from its portrayed appearance the animal is definitely intended to be a Japanese unicorn.

Hampshire. The caller wished to remain anonymous, so I will call him Sam. He said that four hours earlier that day, around 10am, while walking his dog in Stark Park, he saw three men standing by a picnic table. They were wearing black suits, white shirts, black ties, and sunglasses. One had a black fedora hat on. Sam thought they were somewhat robotic in their movements. Archetypal “Men in Black”, in fact. Sam sat down with his dog to watch them. From a black suitcase they produced a camera type of drone. One of them con-

trolled it as the other two looked on. Sam thought they were government agents preparing to spy on someone. He noticed one of them was staring at him and he felt a creepiness throughout his whole body and goosebumps rose on his arms. He tried to turn away from the man’s gaze, but had to keep watching. The drone hovered in one spot and then seemed to morph from a standard-looking camera drone into a small silver disc. Sam thought his eyes were playing tricks. It hovered for a good three minutes at an altitude of 30ft [9m], then

shot straight up very fast leaving an indentation in a cloud, and vanished. When he lowered his eyes, the three men had also disappeared. He looked around to see if there were any witnesses beside himself, but everyone was acting normally, walking their dogs, jogging, etc. Scared out of his wits, he headed home as fast as he could. He had not taken any pictures or video, because he didn’t want to alarm the men by holding up his smart phone.

**Paul Dale Roberts**

*Halo Paranormal Investigations, Sacramento, California*



# IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers

## Family ghosts

Helen Lauer's account of events surrounding the death of her father [FT393:72] was very moving and interesting. It reminded me of my mother's last days in the summer of 1982. She was 68, had had about a decade of ill health and for the previous two years had been having treatment for cancer with all the usual ups and downs it brings. My father had died after a very short fight with the same disease the previous autumn and she had deteriorated since, also finally showing signs of dementia.

My brother and I looked after her at home, and during the period she was able to hold something like a conversation with us she would often claim there was a woman in the house she didn't recognise and kept asking us who she was. We were both a bit creeped out by this as she said it with such conviction, and I'm afraid we were not very gentle in dismissing her belief as imagination. As she slowly went downhill, she would talk non-stop, about family and friends, past and present, only stopping when sheer exhaustion made her fall asleep. As soon as she woke up, she would launch into another roll call of people and events.

Gradually she would talk not about these individuals but *to* them, and finally only to those who were deceased. At this point, I began to feel there was a definite sense of presence in the house, and perhaps it was my longstanding love of ghost stories that made me keep thinking "The family ghosts are assembling" – not that anyone had ever mentioned them doing this before, as far as I knew.

It was a bright, pleasant summer for the most part, and the house seemed especially full of light while the 'presences' were upstairs, downstairs and on the stairs. My mother passed away at exactly 4.30pm one Wednesday afternoon,



and there was a great sense of relief that her suffering was over. The feeling of the 'others' in the house evaporated immediately.

**Len Jackson**  
*Willenhall, West Midlands*

## Monks in Wandsworth

It was interesting reading Michelle's letter about the ghost she experienced when living near Wandsworth Common, and the "monk's feet" walking down invisible steps seen by her mother-in-law in the same house when she was a child [FT395:73]. From 1971 to around 1982 we lived in a large Victorian house on the west side of Wandsworth Common, and my mum told me of a similar experience she had, which I got her to write down. My dad, brother and I must have been away together as she was on her own.

"I was sleeping in the top floor front bedroom," she wrote. "Suddenly I woke up with a start. There at the bottom of the bed facing me was a figure of a monk. He was dressed in a dark habit, his head bent forward. I couldn't see his face and he had his arms folded in front of him. He was just standing there. I was very frightened and switched on the light and there was nothing there. I

spent the rest of the night with the light on. I moved out of that bedroom as soon as possible and didn't go in there again unless I really had to, and even then I made sure I left the door open."

**Geoff Reader**  
*Brighton, East Sussex*

## New Zealand earthlight

The first big earthquake to strike Christchurch, New Zealand (my home town) was about 4.30am on 4 September 2010. It could be felt hundreds of miles away. I was in my tiny cottage in South Canterbury, on the edge of a small town called Waimate, just inland from the eastern coast of the South Island. It was as if a crane were lifting my cottage up, then dumping it down – a horrendous experience, especially as I was alone at the time.

The second major quake struck Christchurch around 1.00pm on 22 February 2011 [registering 6.3 on the Richter scale]. I was in the kitchen of my large city house writing out a recipe for truffles. Luckily, my front door was wide open. I had seconds to flee as everything came crashing down and a large grand piano moved forward two metres. Sadly, 185 people lost their lives.

[Wikipedia tells us this was followed by 361 aftershocks the following week, and then a 5.3R quake on 16 April and a 5.3R quake on 10 May.]

Sometime that year I was awakened in my Waimate cottage by a dull booming sound. Sitting up in bed, I witnessed (though thick curtains) what I took to be an earthlight. It was perhaps a metre off the ground – brilliant, whitish and sparkly – and travelling north at enormous speed.

**Barbara Stevens**  
*Christchurch, New Zealand*

## Mystical Heat

In my twenties I was part of a road protest camp at Tara Hill in Ireland (above left). Many had strange experiences there, including seeing floating orbs and meeting ghosts dressed in Celtic clothes, or being chased by a great fierce brindled hound. My own experience was quite different. It was a cold damp November and I'd curled up in a ball in my tent to go to sleep. I woke in the middle of the night to find I was lying on my back, warm, with gentle heat seeming to radiate out of my chest. I had the feeling the heat was limitless, and with it was a feeling of utter love and bliss that I have never had since. The feeling grew stronger and as it did I felt my body rise up off the ground. It felt to only be a few inches. After a time I felt myself come back to the ground, and I fell asleep. The whole time I felt completely calm. The next day I was unable to hold a conversation and felt like an electric current had gone through me. All I could do was rest on some grass. On my return to London I looked at people differently; I noticed their inner beauty through their eyes rather than their external beauty, especially elderly people.

Has anyone had a similar experience?

**Kathryn Clover**  
*Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire*



# PECULIAR POSTCARDS



**JAN BONDESON** shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past records the curious image of the Derbyshire duck that was apparently preserved in a tree

## 9. THE SHELDON DUCK

Sheldon is a small village in the Derbyshire Peak District, situated to the west of Bakewell. It has a rather ordinary-looking church from 1864 and an ancient lead mine that flourished 250 years ago. The village's major fortean claim to fame is a bizarre natural curiosity, however: ladies and gentlemen, may I present... The Sheldon Duck!

The story goes that back in 1601 some Sheldon villagers were out observing natural phenomena. One of them saw a duck flying over the village green and into the hollow of an ash tree. Since they did not see the bird emerge, they presumed that it had got trapped inside the tree trunk. The puzzled villagers scratched their heads in confusion and debated the strange tale of the disappearing duck at length. The duck in the ash tree became one of the main curiosities of Sheldon folklore, the tale of its strange demise passed down through several generations.

Fast forward nearly 300 years to May 1893. The Sheldon 'duck tree', as it was still called by the locals, now stood near the residence of Mr Harry Buxton. Since it had been overhanging the road and the bottom part had become partially decayed, it was decided to cut it down. Messrs Wilson & Son, the Ashford-in-the-Water joiners and the purchasers of the tree, had it transported to their timber yard. When the old tree was cut up, the lower portion was at first discarded, but it was later decided to cut it into two. There was much amazement when it turned out to contain the near-perfect image of a duck, complete with bill, head and wings.

It was concluded that the



ABOVE: An unposted card featuring the Sheldon Duck.

duck of 1601 really *had* flown into the tree and got stuck in a crevice in its trunk; as the centuries passed, the bird had slowly passed from the realm of ornithology to that of dendrology. A living duck, prematurely buried and surrounded by solid wood, had been reduced to an esoteric pattern inside the tree trunk. A further marvel was that there were marks of rot in the timber where it was presumed the duck's brain, lights and liver had once been. The body of the bird measured 8in (20cm) across and 21in (53cm) long. "A Sheldon tradition, now nearly 300 years old, is verified!" exclaimed the delighted *Derbyshire Times*. Mr Samuel Ashton, of Ashford, bought the two boards with the duck and exhibited them to his friends. After being displayed at the local post office for some time, the boards with the duck were returned to the timber

merchant, Mr Wilson, who polished them and mounted them in a mantelpiece in his home, Great Batch Hall in Church Street, Bakewell. This old and valuable house still exists, and so, presumably, do the curious boards with the imprint of the duck.

Already in 1923, a rationalist reared his ugly head, pointing out that the Sheldon Duck must have been "an accidental freak of growth"; there was a large stone at the British Museum, the pedant 'JBW' pontificated in the *Derby Daily Telegraph*, that held a marked resemblance to the head of the poet Chaucer, but no one suggested that the poet's head had petrified after death. Sceptical naturalists have also scoffed at the old legend: was it normal for a duck to fly head first into a hole in an old tree, like some demented woodpecker, rather than to stick to its normal

semi-aquatic habitat? And the image of the duck on the boards appears to be lacking both legs and a tail, organs the creature would surely have found most useful in its daily activities. Readers of *FT* are used to seeing unexpected natural images known as simulacra: tree branches resembling snakes, stones looking like the head of a troll, and cats resembling Adolf Hitler. This phenomenon is known by the rationalists as pareidolia: the misinterpretation of random images as pictures of some object or person. But even if it is just a chimæra, I still treasure my postcard of the Duck, sold in Ashford in the 1930s and a curious fortean image if ever there was one. *Derbyshire Times*, 27 May 1893, 16 Jan 1897; *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 1 Aug 1910, 1 Nov 1923; *At the Edge* 4 (Dec 1996); *Peak Advertiser*, 5 April 2004.



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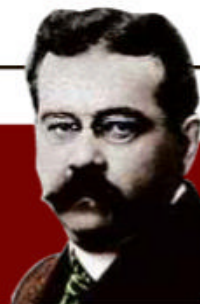
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# WHY FORTEAN?



**FORTEAN TIMES** is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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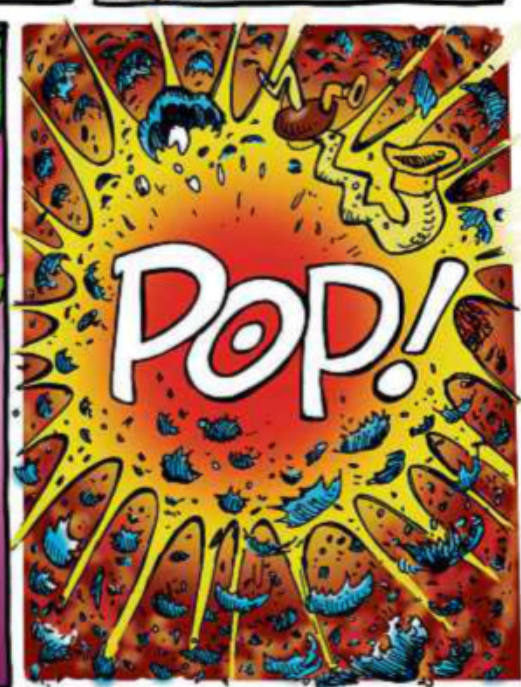
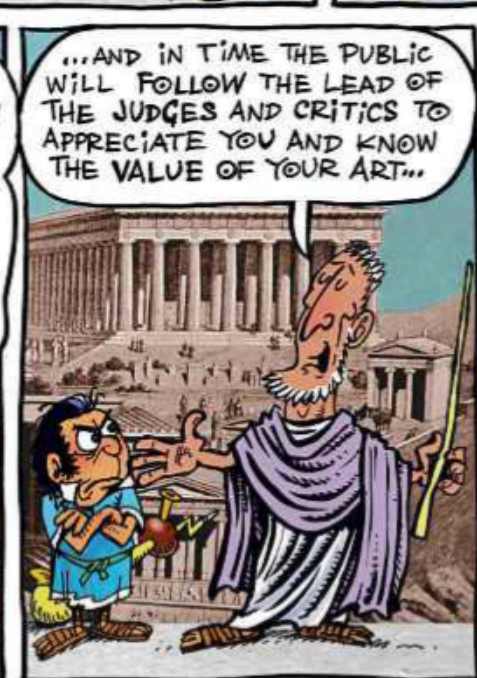
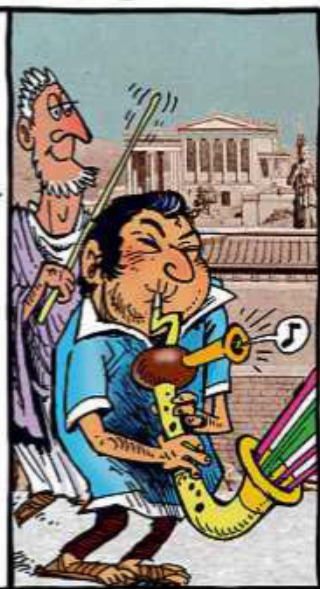
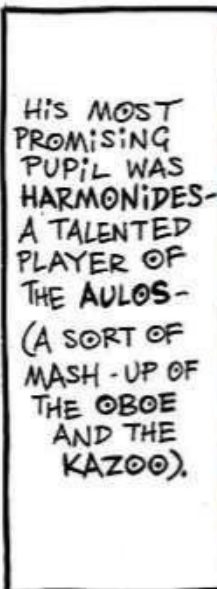
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# PHENOMENOMIX

ODD DEATHS IN ANCIENT GREEK MUSIC  
Number 2 - HARMONIDES

HUNT EMERSON





# COMING NEXT MONTH



## AINTREE SPECTRES

THE MYSTERIOUS ROBED  
CULTISTS OF MERSEYSIDE



## BUMPS IN THE NIGHT

THE SPOOKY SOUNDS OF EAST  
HADDAM, CONNECTICUT



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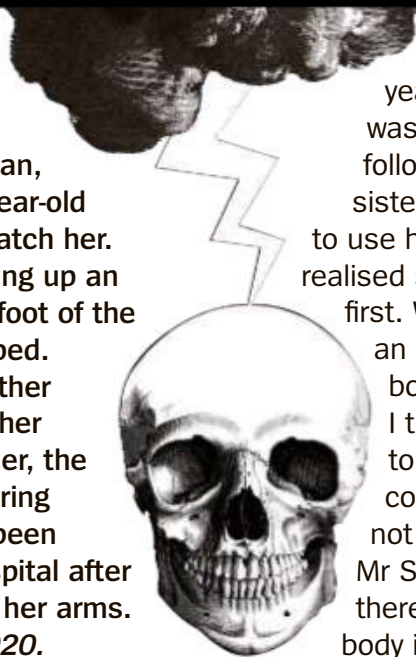
# FORTEAN TIMES 399

ON SALE 5 NOV 2020

# STRANGE DEATHS

## UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A 15-year-old girl jumped off the rooftop of a 25-storey building in Sichuan, China, landing on her 42-year-old father who was trying to catch her. Rescue workers were setting up an inflatable mattress at the foot of the building when the girl jumped. She died along with her father as he attempted to break her fall. According to her mother, the 15-year-old had been suffering from depression and had been receiving treatment at hospital after her parents found cuts on her arms. [nextshark.com](http://nextshark.com), 27 Aug 2020.



years old, he disappeared, but was only reported missing the following year. Four years later, his sister, now 69, decided she'd like to use her older brother's room, but realised she would need to clean it up first. While doing so, she discovered an unclothed and skeletonised body. "I found something that I think are human bones," she told police, who confirmed the corpse to be human, and, while not yet having been identified as Mr Suenaga, investigators believe there is a high probability that the body is his. The house is not large, so police were surprised that the two younger siblings had spent years in such close proximity to the remains of their brother. They were also curious about the fact that when they reported him missing, the brother and sister told police that Mr Suenaga "hasn't come home in over a year", implying that they had seen him leaving the house at some point. [soranews24.com](http://soranews24.com), 17 Aug 2020.

A daredevil who died in a plunge over Niagara Falls in a stunt involving an inflatable ball may have been accompanied by a two-metre (7ft) boa constrictor, investigators believe. After Kirk Jones's body was recovered from water below the falls, New York State police found a website featuring a photo of the 53-year-old stuntman posing with the snake, named Misty. "Believe in the Impossible Kirk Jones + Misty Conquer Niagara Falls" read the caption. On the same day it's believed Jones died, tourists spotted an 2.5m (8ft) plastic ball with its hatch open, spinning in the rapids before tumbling over the brink. Misty's body has not been recovered, although an empty snake cage was found in Jones's parked van. A crashed drone belonging to Jones was also recovered, but the footage from its camera showed only rushing water. In 2003, Jones became the first person to survive the drop over Niagara Falls without a safety device when the then-unemployed salesman climbed over a rail and into the water in what appeared to be a suicide attempt. Despite such stunts being illegal, several daredevils have risked their lives in various contraptions, starting with 63-year-old schoolteacher Annie Edison Taylor, who in 1901 survived a trip over the falls in an oak barrel (FT45:62-66). [BBC News](http://BBC News), 27 Aug; [newyorkupstate.com](http://newyorkupstate.com), 28 Aug 2017.

A Brazilian shop worker's dead body was left concealed on the shop floor while customers continued to come in and out.

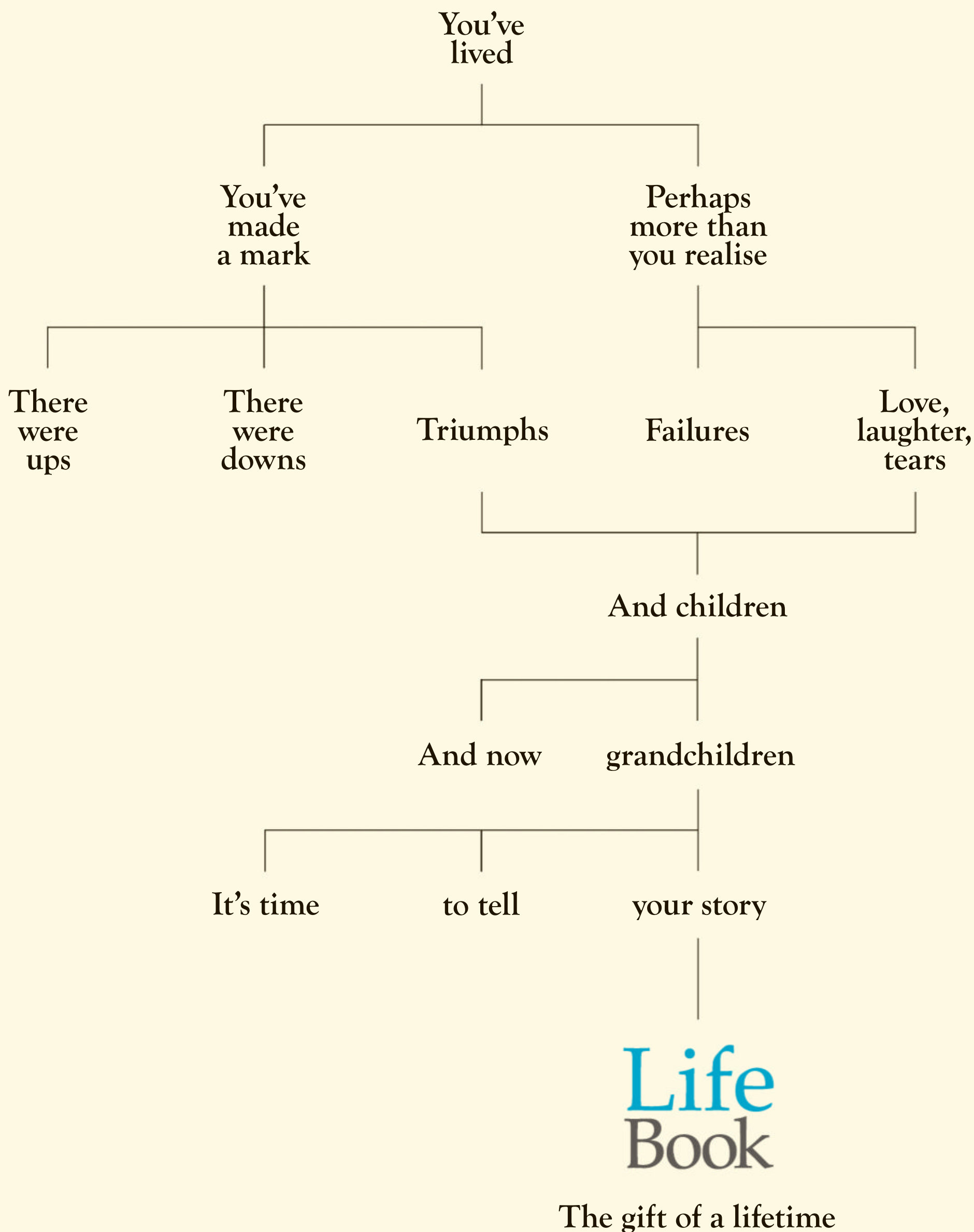
Sales manager Manoel Moisés Cavalcante, 59, suffered a heart attack at the Recife branch of the Carrefour Brasil chain on 14 August. Despite an ambulance being called and first aid administered, he could not be saved. Instead of closing the store, staff continued to welcome customers, covering the body with three umbrellas and a number of cardboard boxes.

The company, one of Brazil's largest retail chains, was forced to apologise after photos of the incident went viral. In a statement, they admitted the action had been "disrespectful", but insisted staff had "followed guidelines to not remove the body from its place", adding that they had now updated their guidelines to include mandatory closure of stores in future instances of staff or customer deaths, aiming to treat "rare situations like this" with "more sensitivity and respect". [metro.co.uk](http://metro.co.uk), 20 Aug 2020.

A 29-year-old man was shot dead in Union Springs, Alabama, for crossing the road too slowly. Johnarian Travez Allen was shot eight times by Jeremiah Wesley Penn, 22, who confessed to the crime after turning himself in. Mr Allen had gone to a convenience store to buy food, but as he was walking across the road, the suspect, Mr Penn, drove up and opened fire with multiple shots because he believed Mr Allen was walking too slowly. Mr Penn is being held on a capital murder charge in the County Jail. [wsfa.com](http://wsfa.com), 28 Aug 2020.

Sumio Suenaga lived in a house in Kasugai, Japan, with his younger sister and brother. In 2015, when he was 66





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